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THE CANTEENERS







ZOUAVES.

# THE CANTEENERS

By AGNES M. DIXON

WITH 22 ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1917

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TO  
THE FRENCH POILU  
AS I HAVE KNOWN HIM  
TO HIS COURAGE, PATIENCE, MODESTY AND  
CHIVALRY  
TO HIS DOGGEDNESS AND GRIM DETERMINATION  
TO RID HIS BELOVED *PATRIE*  
OF THE FOUL AND CRUEL INVADER



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*The Author's profits from the sale of this book will be given to the London Committee of the French Red Cross, under whose ægis the "Cantines des Dames Anglaises" are established in France.*



# THE CANTEENERS

TROYES,

*Monday, Oct. 12, 1915.*

I WRITE in bed at the end of our first day of work. Truly we have not achieved much ! We have given 300 men each a quarter of a litre of coffee ! And we have spent, four of us, the clock round in doing it. Breakfast, 7.30 ; out at 8, to wrestle with ironmongers and wholesale grocers, as our *marchandise* from England still has not come, though sent off ten days ago. Our shopping resulted in buying and taking with us 100 kilos of coffee, 100 kilos of sugar and some boxes of biscuits, and as the shop horse and waggon were at the door, we annexed them, stowed the sacks inside, were kindly lent two empty packing cases by the grinning staff, upon which we seated ourselves, and so drove off along

## THE CANTEENERS

the Croncels road ; the amazed sentries admitted our equipage on to the platform with open mouths.

But at least we had the wherewithal to start. Of course, nothing went right at first ; the fire would not burn, the water would not boil, the coffee would not grind fast enough—it takes a good while to grind coffee enough for 300 men. In the middle of everything being at sixes and sevens, at about 11 came a message from the *médecin chef* to say about 500 men would go off by train at 1. We could not give them anything but coffee, because we had not got it ; but we were on the way to make enough for 400, and we did get that ready, and in the end we only had 240 to supply, and twenty-five *infirmiers*. Another train was to follow, so we continued to grind, grind, grind. By 2 o'clock we had time to think of having some lunch—we wanted it. We had bread and butter, ham, potted meat, cheese, grapes, pears, and our own excellent coffee.

Our recipe, a French one, is 100 litres of water, 14 litres coffee, 6 litres sugar.

## IN TROYES

No chicory. Chicory should never be mixed with black coffee, only with *café au lait*.

We waited until 6 for that train that did not come, by which time we gave it up, and returned to the hotel, but during dinner came a message that 100 wounded would pass through at midnight. No train, pouring rain, and a two-mile walk in the dark.

Such is war.

The Grand Hotel St. Laurent must be the noisiest place in the world. There are only three sorts of noise that we have not got—cats, dogs, and cocks. We have all the rest. My room is over the kitchen; the hotel is a typical old French provincial inn, with a partly-covered courtyard behind it; the back part of it is covered with glass, and forms a carpentering shed and a garage and a repair shop. This morning we had an assortment of vociferous workmen, sawing wood, hammering metal, and knocking in nails; a chauffeur (I think one of the ladies of the Scotch unit,

## THE CANTEENERS

who to-morrow are all posting off to Salonika) testing the running of her engine and practising the exhaust; Madame la Patronne screaming into the ear of the very deaf Monsieur le Patron, and Madame Mère shouting at short intervals down the telephone; much coming and going and shrill talking of early birds and worms; clattering of cups and saucers; grinding of coffee machine and cleaning, raking out and stoking of kitchen range. In the middle distance, quite inaudible separately, the ordinary street noises of a busy market town with cobbled pavements. There may have been other noises; if so, they were drowned. I have just changed my room, which looked on to the courtyard, to one higher up, which looks on the street. It may be quieter; it could not be noisier.

Our Colonel is charming to us: his manner is both friendly and paternal, as though we were daughters of the regiment, and he makes us feel that we are welcome and honoured guests. One could imagine him a descendant of the Vikings,

## OUR COLONEL

with his far-seeing blue eyes, his fair hair, and his great height and breadth.

He received us at his bureau with effusion and delight. He expatiated on the beauty of our hut, its dryness, strength, and convenience. He had almost built it with his own hands, and planted plants in front of it, and fixed British and French flags on the top. When at a loss for a word in conversation he uses the word *chose*, and introduced me to another officer as Madame Chose. He evidently loves his men, and equally evidently is loved by them. He took us at once to see our hut, whisking us off in a motor car—somebody else's, I think. His face shone when we reached it, and he sort of waved us together with both hands, as though we and the hut were long lost brothers. Truly the hutment was a darling, just like Wendy's in "Peter Pan." He pointed out all its perfections; like a child with a new toy—the double walls, the space filled with cinders under the floor for dryness, the garden in front (two yards of mould with three plants in it!).

It had been run up in five days, and was

## THE CANTEENERS

ready for immediate use: a range, two tables, cupboard, shelves, and all the necessary cooking apparatus—saucepans, marmites, plates, knives and forks, colander, coffee-grinder, pails, basins, etc.; electric light laid on and a pump just outside. The hut is divided in two: the kitchen, very well lighted, is the bigger part, and behind is a small room, where we keep our stores, and which contains a bed for our soldier servant who guards the place at night. Coals and wood are given us, and we are to buy our vegetables and bread cheap from the Army contractor.

We have “2<sup>me</sup> Armée” posted up on our canteen, also “Dames Anglaises de la Goutte de Café.” In front of our big window is a wide sort of shelf, where we can serve out our wares. But we prefer to serve the soldiers direct in the trains, as it gives us a chance of talking to them and hearing their stories.

The Colonel told us we belong to the 2nd Army, whose base is at Troyes, and invited us to move forward with it, and promised we should occupy a “palais” in

## THE MATUTINAL BAKER

Germany. Of course we said that where he went there we would go too.

Our *marchandises* from London have still not arrived, though they are at the station. But military necessities come before ours, and they are hung up there till to-morrow. So we had to start by buying in coffee and sugar, etc., wholesale, to go on with. Madame la Patronne at the hotel recommended us to a warehouse where we got what we wanted: prices very high—coffee 3·90 a kilo and sugar 1·14.

On Friday night, just as I was going to bed, I had a note from the commandant to say that wounded were expected from the front at 7 a.m. Juliet and I arranged to go early as Miss Gracie seemed tired, and we got up at 5.30 and reached the canteen at 6.30. I started out with a stick of chocolate to eat on the way, but as I noticed a baker's shop was already open, I plunged into the dark doorway to buy some rolls. M. the *boulangier* was apparently in his bath behind the counter; it seemed odd, but it is best to take no

## THE CANTEENERS

notice of foreign habits, so I asked for two halfpenny rolls and finally made out in the gloom of the dawn that he *had* a pair of trousers on. He was enormously stout, and beautifully clean, and he was powdered all over with flour just like a nice clean baby after its hot bath. We neither of us took the slightest notice of the *contretemps*.

It was very pleasant in the early morning: cool and fresh and quiet, slightly misty. Our excellent Bourgeot had got the message we had telephoned through the night before, although the exchange had utterly denied that the Quai Croncels was on the telephone at all; and he had been up since 4 stoking the fire and heating up our coffee and *bouillon*, all of which has to be made ready overnight.

At 12 came another note that over 300 more were expected about 11, but they only required coffee, as dinner was going to be given them. Tables and benches were arranged all along the platform, and when the train got in (two hours late, of course) all who were well enough sat down there in

## FEEDING GERMAN PRISONERS

the warm sunshine, weary, depressed, silent, dirty, grimed ; some with torn clothes, dried blood on them ; others with sleeves cut out to make room for splinted arms. A sad, sorry crew they looked as they sat there waiting to be fed ; all had been in the train since 7, and many since the night before, without food. A small table was set at a little distance, laid for six, and after a time, when all the French soldiers had sat down, six wounded German prisoners came along and occupied it, guarded by two soldiers with fixed bayonets. They had faded, stained and dirty uniforms on ; one was an officer, and all wore round service caps. They looked fairly decent men ; three wore spectacles, and all spoke politely.

I said to the *médecin-chef*, “ Don’t you think our coffee is much too *strong* for those Germans ? ” and he agreed that we might fairly water it a little. However, we didn’t. We gave them each some, and all thanked us politely. No doubt they supposed us to be French. But we drew the line at cigarettes ; they didn’t get any of those. It was wonderful to watch the

## THE CANTEENERS

men's faces change as they ate—they were so silent and depressed at first ; then the hot *bouillon* took a crease or two out of their faces ; next came a plate of meat and a quart of wine ; finally a cup of hot coffee which made them smile ; accompanied by two cigarettes each, which made their eyes fairly gleam.

Poor human wreckage ! And to think that this goes on every day of every month. And to think what it must be in wreckage of German lives, who now have a fighting front of 1,400 miles. These men all came from Vitry le François ; the train before from Tahure. I fancy the next attack is developing, and we shall have our work cut out.

It was a pretty sight—the long tables in the sunshine, with the lines of men in every shade of blue ; it is nearly the same colour as our blues, but a little lighter. Their enjoyment was evident, and it was easy to start them talking and gesticulating by asking them if they had killed many Boches and how many prisoners they had taken. The bad cases remained

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GROUP OF TRAINS AT TROYES.

## ONLY A “*CHEF*”!

on their stretchers, or were carried in to the dressing-stations to be attended to. We went along the train afterwards and fed the poor things with coffee and cigarettes. How heavy men are, if you want to lift their head and shoulders to drink! We must get some proper drinking cups for them with spouts.

When all this was over, at about 5, we had to make coffee for next morning.

A pretty long day, but worth it all for the pleasure we gave.

Miss Gracie told us an amusing story of her last canteen. Early in the proceedings the *médecin-chef* came to see them with one or two others, and Miss M. only heard the word “*chef*” of the introduction; she was a little flustered as her French was not fluent, so Miss Gracie carried on an animated, and, I do not doubt, a friendly, conversation. Miss M. looked worried and finally said tartly to Miss G.: “You had better go into the other room and go on with the coffee.” Miss Gracie meekly went at once. Miss M. said, “Bon jour”

## THE CANTEENERS

firmly to the *médecin-chef* and turned away.

Presently she went in to Miss G. and said severely : “ I don’t know how it is in *your* country, but *we* don’t think it at all *convenable* to be so *decidedly* friendly to a *cook* ” (Miss G. is American).

The Colonel, after several *pourparlers* with the Mayor, commandeered an empty house for us ; the inhabitants had fled in terror on September 5, 1914, when it was expected the Germans would reach Troyes in two or three days. He offered it to us as a rare gem—a *bijou* : “ *Tout ce qu’il y a de convenable et pratique ; grand, avec onze chambres,*” big enough for both canteen parties ; then added it was “ *complètement meublé ; mais—pas de lits.*” “ But,” he said hurriedly, “ *des lits, on peut les commander ; ou les louer ; rien, rien.*” We thought ourselves frightfully lucky to step into such a prize without price, as we were to have it free. Alas ! it turned out to be the kind of gift-horse you dare not look in the mouth. It was not *meublé* at all ; it had not even a kitchen

## A QUESTION OF BEDS

range. *But* it was well-built, dry, and convenient in position. It had a weed-grown garden ; it had water laid on ; it HAD A BATHROOM.

It sounds rather mad with winter coming on, but six of our party have taken it—the youngest members. They have hired beds, produced like rabbits from a conjuror's hat, by the doctor, when the whole of Troyes could not produce a bed, because the hospitals had bought them all. They have bought the absolute necessities—such as a chair, a table, a wash-basin, a strip of carpet, and so on. Army blankets have been lent them, and coal is to be supplied. Each girl will have a fire in her bedroom, and a candle. It does not sound comfortable, I know, with winter coming on, and I am hazy about what they are going to eat. But it is really simpler in war time, and if you are busy, not to eat.

We have had no trains to-day, so have been rather slack, but we had a sheet worry instead. The Colonel came round to us, much disturbed. He found the ladies had beds and blankets, but no sheets ;

## THE CANTEENERS

they must have sheets. He gave a hurried order to the doctor that he was to provide them, and hurried away in his motor. Then the doctor became disturbed. He *had* no sheets ; anyway, we had no right to hospital sheets, because we were not the army, only *volontaires*. Yet the Colonel had commanded. What *could* he do ? There were only two pairs of sheets, and they were in use. He paused in distress. Suddenly he brightened ; an idea had reached him. He called for a bicycle, leapt upon it, and dashed away. Incredibly soon he was back again, glowing, panting ; begged me to come with him at once to the house of a friend a short distance away, who would *lend* sheets to the six ladies.

“ Monsieur,” I said deprecatingly, “ five *paires* de draps ; c’est impossible.” But he said No ; she had promised, and I must come immediately and be introduced to her. So off we went, walking at a furious pace—it was all so vitally important, you know—till I was obliged to remind him I could not walk as fast as the French army can, at which he slackened at once, but

## AND SHEETS

had increased almost to a run before we got to the house. However, we got the sheets all right, willingly lent by his friend, who turned out to be his landlady, and when I got back I sent off a soldier to fetch them. But that was not the end of the sheet worry. In half an hour the doctor was back again, accompanied by an orderly, whom the Colonel had sent to him about the sheets. The orderly would not believe that the doctor had actually *found* sheets already, so he had been dragged to me for my additional evidence. The orderly said the Colonel was “*bien agité, très dérangé à cause de ces draps.*” Between us, however, we did manage to calm the orderly down, and I sent such a message to the good Colonel that I trust he has been able to sleep in peace between his own sheets.

Aren't they nice ?

The Colonel easily gets *agité*, but I must say it is mostly about our comfort. He takes up little points, and his whole mind is engrossed by them for the moment. One point was a “cabinet” for our use. He insisted on it; he *exigeait* it; he gave

## THE CANTEENERS

orders about it to every official, always in our presence. We must have a key to it ; we must have the exclusive use of it, and so on. He has forgotten about it now, but for days it was dragged into every conversation, he always using the English word.

We had also to-day a visit from quite a swell, the man next above the Colonel—I think the *Commandant d'étape*. He also came to ask if there was anything he could do for us—he was afraid we must be *triste* ! But of course there was nothing. Our coal is bad, and we want a pig-pail, but one does not ask the *Commandant d'étape* for a pig-pail !

Miss Gracie made us all laugh last night. She told a story of her and her people travelling in Cornwall. She told it three times over, because the party round the table only heard bits at first, and each insisted on hearing it over again from the beginning. Miss G. herself was so overcome each time with emotion she could hardly articulate. It seems an old Cornish farmer in the train became friendly with these Americans : he lauded his county,

## A TALE OF A PASTY

its inhabitants, and its merchandise. Finally he pulled from his pocket—which apparently also contained snuff, tobacco, tarred twine, onions, peppermints, and other powerful items—a Cornish pasty, which he proceeded to cut in sections and offer round. Each politely took a piece, and wondered mutely *how* they could eat it. At that moment they plunged into a tunnel, and each was seized with the same brilliant idea. They one after the other leant across the old man and threw their portion out of the open window into the friendly darkness of the tunnel. At length they emerged to find . . . the window had been shut after all !

It is a pity to go on after the end of a story, but we did ask her what her unfortunate countrymen did next. Did they not get out immediately at the next wayside station ?

“Heavens, no !” she said ; “we were in an express, and the train did not stop for forty-seven miles.”

She said it was the most awful thing that had ever happened to her, and she has never

## THE CANTEENERS

got over it. The old farmer's gentle dignity would have moved a stone to weep, and the pasty was to have been his dinner.

We had another fearful swell to visit the Hôpital d'Evacuation on Saturday—a General of some sort. I am seldom able to catch their names. They are all dragged to see us and introduced, and we act the *Entente Cordiale* and offer them coffee, which they usually accept, and always praise. When we have warning of the approach of these luminaries we are as tidy and neat as a new pin. We knew about this one coming, because every soldier in the place was frantically cleaning *something*; if he couldn't find something to clean he polished something that somebody else had just done, or swept imaginary leaves from the platform. We could not get the slightest attention from anyone. Most of them were buzzing like wasps round honey over, under, and in a Red Cross train, which stood waiting near by. They swept, scrubbed, polished, and scoured; and as far as I could see the General never even looked at it.

## FOLLOWING THE WAR

Our hut was exquisite—cleaned, garnished with fresh flowers, the stove newly blacked. Juliet had a coffee stain down one side of her apron, so she had to be careful and keep her other side turned towards him.

The *infirmiers* often want to buy things from us because they are not allowed to go into the town, so we have now a little stall of chocolate, tinned milk, and cigarettes, which they buy from us at wholesale prices. We have a crowd always round our window in the morning, as we bring papers out with us and discuss the news, and I have spread out some large maps of the war, which they pore over, searching the names of the places they read about, and trying to pronounce the English versions. They are all dreadfully concerned about poor little Serbia, and are terribly afraid the Allies will not get to her aid in time, but it looks to-day as if they had.

We have a constant visitor in a man called Bourgeois, a French-Canadian, who speaks English in a refined, gentle, low voice; he is curiously attractive. He brings us little offerings in the way of

## THE CANTEENERS

coloured leaves, branches of wild strawberries, and moss. Once he brought me some of his cider. In return we give him *bouillon* or barley broth, as he has *mal d'estomac*.

When our soldier servant, Bourgeot, goes into the town to do any errand for us I have to write him out a military pass, or he might get into trouble.

It seems to me that life can be very cheap in Troyes, considering it is war time. I pay 60 francs a month for my bedroom, with a little dressing-room off it—electric light, coffee, rolls, and butter in the morning. My fire is extra. We always lunch, and generally have tea, at our canteen. My evening meal I get for myself, and have eggs, bread and butter, fruit, dried figs and raisins, cream-cheese, chocolate, etc. In the market one buys beautiful cheeses. You can get a penny roll of sweet cream cheese, which I like better than butter, and is enough for two meals. I can buy as much bread as I can eat in two days for 1½d. New laid eggs are 2d. each, but scarce.

## MASS AT THE CATHEDRAL

Fruit is very plentiful. I bought nine large crisp red apples to-day for  $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ , and enormous juicy pears are  $1\frac{1}{2}d.$  each. Champagne grapes are very nice. They are large, of a transparent warm yellow, dusted with bloom, but where the sun has caught them they are almost apricot-coloured. Butter is dear, 2·25 francs a pound, but cakes and sweets are no dearer than usual, and at the *pâtisserie* they have a large variety of penny tarts and cakes of all sorts, including chocolate *éclairs*. We can get decent chocolate for the soldiers at 3·10 francs a kilo, but that is wholesale price.

Alas ! All the photographs Miss G. took of us when we first began work at the canteen, and of the picnic lunch and the German prisoners, are all spoilt because she did them on a roll she had used before !

On the morning of our second Sunday I went to the mass at the cathedral. There was a very small congregation, and nearly everyone was in black. The music was poor, but the singing good. There are two

## THE CANTEENERS

organs, one close to the choir, which plays accompaniments, and another at the west end ; when an effect is needed, or great noise, both play together, but all the big stops are in the west organ.

The preacher, covered with beautiful old lace, was conducted to his pulpit, and locked in, by a glorious beadle clad in scarlet cloth coat and breeches, white silk stockings, and buckled shoes and a Napoleonic hat ; he carried a mace, and was much bedizened with gold lace, gold braid, tassels, cords, and epaulettes. In the midst of the service a lady stood up in the middle of the church, caught the beadle's eye, beckoned him to her, and handed him her umbrella. He took it respectfully and went away with it out of the south door. I puzzled much over this. Could the beadle off duty be an umbrella-mender, and be thus improving the shining hour of the sermon ?

Troyes has a delightful market. There is the out-door market, where booths and stalls under awnings are ranged in rows in a great open square. Here are sold all the

## TROYES MARKET

necessities of life, so that I cannot see why there need be shops as well. Here you can buy fruit, umbrellas, cakes and sweets, envelopes and bootlaces, pottery and children's frocks, socks, shoes, slippers and boots. Here the chestnut merchant roasts chestnuts at so many a sou, the knife-grinder sharpens cutlery, the umbrella-mender mends, the cobbler cobbles, the cheap jack calls his wares. The wrinkled old women sit behind their stalls, with spotless white frilled caps on their heads, endeavouring to attract attention from the passer-by.

Close by is the huge covered market hall, where the principal wares are vegetables, poultry, cheese, butter, and eggs. It is curious to step inside and gradually distinguish the prevailing word in the babel of noise. It is "Madame," . . . "Oui, Madame; Non, Madame; Bien, Madame; Bonjour, Madame; Combien, Madame? Ici, Madame; Deux pièces, Madame; Quat' sous, Madame; Pardon, Madame; Voilà, Madame; Au revoir, Madame. . . ." The emphasis is so much on the last syllable

## THE CANTEENERS

that one really hears little but " Dame, Dame, Dame."

In the early morning (I am often out between 7 and 8) Troyes is a town of running water. Water pours down each side of every street and alley, bursting out of iron tunnels every few feet at the edge of the path. The water flows out often to a width of a yard. The paths, except along the main streets, are absurdly narrow, often only a foot wide. The windows of the ground-floor rooms are all guarded with iron grilles, which project at least six inches about the height of one's shoulder. This does not leave one much room to walk, even if one has the footpath to oneself. Add to this the fact that at the time when I go to the Bureau de Poste, to fetch my letters before going off to the canteen, all householders place outside their doors their dustbins and pails of refuse to be collected by the municipal carts. So one is incessantly brought up by the Scylla of an impassable side-path and the Charybdis of a flowing and eddying stream, unless one leaps all the dustbins in succession. The

## DOGS, HORSES AND COBBLES

streets are badly paved with old and irregular setts, on the highest of which one picks one's rather painful way, if one's shoes are thin.

There are a few Belgian dogs which help to draw carts, running underneath with a broad band round their chests. They never pull alone. There are beautiful horses here—quite remarkably so, broad and sleek and well fed ; well-treated also. I have never seen an over-loaded or badly treated horse ; every one seems kind to their animals, and proud of them. The dogs are of course taught to howl at the word “ Boche.”

The streets, being cobbled, are very noisy. One is sometimes awakened in the morning at perhaps 5 by what sounds like a machine-gun outside one's window ; but I have found from observation that it is a handcart being drawn over the excrescences of the *pavé*, the iron wheels bumping from stone to stone. I think they are the carts from the country round, which send their produce early to the market.

The time to see Troyes is between

## THE CANTEENERS

5 and 7 in the evening. In the daytime Troyes looks much like any ordinary French town; it consists principally of bare-headed, black-shawled women, going about each armed with either a string bag or a market basket, out of which protrude leeks, carrots, turnips, apples, eggs, cheese, etc., and from which a vivid imagination can construct the future dinner of the family. There are also a few soldiers, some children (if they do not happen to be at school), and plenty of old men. But at 5 the soldiers are allowed out from the barracks, and all Troyes joins them in the streets; the whole of life is immediately keyed up to a higher note; the shops turn up their lights, the hot chestnut man in the Place de la République, whom nobody has noticed all the afternoon, immediately becomes besieged by ever-increasing waves of infantry—like German assaults. As soon as the first line is dealt with the next springs up ready, till the supply is exhausted. The evening paper-boys scuffle and struggle across the square, and their editions are sold out before they reach the

## SOLDIERS AT LARGE.

other side. How the French Tommy can afford an evening paper on  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a day I do not know. He is going to have 5 sous in the future, but not till November 1.

It is amusing to be about in the town at this time in the evening, but not if you want to get anywhere, as you simply can't get through. It is a quiet, well-behaved crowd, but not a sad one; there is no horseplay, and no drunkenness. The soldiers go about in groups, or with their friends and families. By 7 it is all over, and Troyes looks like London early on Sunday morning.

I like to see the soldiers drifting into the churches. They stroll about very quietly, and gaze at the beautiful glass windows; often they kneel for a few minutes, and reverently cross themselves before they go out. I have seen one or two kneeling motionless with bowed head and shut eyes for perhaps half an hour. Were they communing with their dead, or praying for their souls? Or were they putting up a prayer for themselves when their days of danger should come?

## THE CANTEENERS

People drift in and out of the churches a good deal. There are eight large ones—right in among the streets. They are so quiet and peaceful, and death and one's dead seem so near these days—so many widows, and obvious mourning mothers, pass up and down the streets. If it were not for the soldiers in their gay blues and reds, the streets would look very sombre.

The uniforms are beyond my comprehension. I took notes of several :

1. Dark brown corduroy suit ; scarlet hat.

2. Khaki suit ; red fez.

3. Light blue suit ; khaki puttees ; black hat.

4. Dark blue coat ; purple breeches.

5. Dark yellow tunic ; light yellow breeches ; dark blue puttees ; crimson cap.

6. Light blue coat ; scarlet breeches ; brown gaiters.

7. Light blue tunic ; light blue velvet cord breeches with yellow piping ; scarlet cap ; dark blue gaiters.



THE PIPER.



OUR CORNER.



## DIVERS UNIFORMS

8. Yellow tunic ; yellow breeches ; dark blue puttees ; yellow cap with scarlet centre and long black tassel.

9. Dark grey suit ; scarlet piping ; light blue cap ; dark red velvet collar.

(N.B.—A velvet collar denotes a doctor.)

If the Kaiser keeps his promise to his bankers he has to bring the war to an end in two days.

Mrs. Sollas went yesterday to buy a small piece of meat. She went to a butcher and asked for a little piece of *bœuf*. They shook their heads indulgently. Well, then, a piece of *veau*? “Mais non, Madame,” they smiled back. “Nous n’avons en vente ici que du cheval.”

Mrs. Sollas has found a very nice little apartment, “deux chambres avec cuisine.” I went in to see her installed, and found it very pleasant and homelike. Her floors are of dark polished wood, and slope in every direction except the horizontal. She has one stove between the two rooms, but it is fierce enough to heat a church. Her “cuisine” consists of a gas ring in a

## THE CANTEENERS

cupboard one foot deep by three and a half wide.

Last night the great bourdon bell of the cathedral boomed out for ten minutes—most impressive. I had not heard it before. One could imagine the requiem of a saint or an archangel.

I have been to see the St. Bernard canteen at work. Its work differs mostly from ours in that it is absolutely regular and unremitting, and according to a *régime* ordered by the doctors; whereas ours is spasmodic and irregular. We have periods of great activity followed by periods of inaction, and we supply practically, within limits, what we like. The St. Bernard canteen is supplied with all its raw material; we find ourselves in everything except coal, wood, and water.

I got there by invitation in time for tea, which took place quite leisurely in the room behind their kitchen. Now and then one of the girls would dash to the range to see nothing was burning, or to mend the fire. At about 4.15 the work of dishing up and distributing the dinner was begun.

## THE ST. BERNARD CANTEEN

The great marmites, each holding 100 litres, one full of hot milk, the other of *bouillon*, were lifted down on to the floor. Presently the *infirmiers* began to collect at the open window, which looks across grass and trees on to the hospital. Each *infirmier* was armed with two pails and a written list. The soldier servant stood by the window, the girls each at her appointed place—one by the milk marmite, one by the *bouillon*, and two at the range. The scene was a lively one to watch, as everything must be done rapidly to insure the men getting their rations hot. I stood on the mat by the door, as a child stands on a sand mountain, with the waves lapping the sides of it. My waves were milk and soup. The soldier servant took the lists one by one from the gesticulating, impatient mob of *infirmiers*, who reminded me of Arab porters at Cairo railway station, and presented them to the girls who were serving out, calling each out loud :

“ Five litres milk ” ;

“ Two eggs, two biscuits, one rice ” ;

“ Four macaroni, two beefteks ” ;

## THE CANTEENERS

“ Ten litres *bouillon* ” ;

“ Six *purée de pommes* ” ;

“ Three rice, three biscuits ” ;

“ Two *bouillon*, two eggs,”

and so on, until all the patients had had their portions measured out into the tins, and the last *infirmier* had left the window. Everyone worked at high pressure, and it was all over in ten minutes. Then I came down off my refuge and tasted all the dishes, and the girls took stock of what was left, decided what should be used again for to-morrow, and what should be used up for their supper. While I was waiting for tea to be ready two of the doctors had come in and had tasted everything too. I presume they approve of the cooking, as the girls find more and more patients are put in their charge. The day I was there they had seventy to cook for. We both have the same trouble with the coal—it is very bad, and it is very difficult to get a really hot fire. Needless to say, it is French coal; all the good coal comes from England, as the good coal district of France is in the enemy's hands. Not only is decent

## MY ADDRESS

coal very dear, but it is often impossible to get, as it gets hung up somewhere or other on account of military precedence. For instance, I have had a small stove put in my room, to burn anthracite ; but now we can't get anthracite for love or money, so I sit fireless. However, as the French say, " C'est dur, mon Dieu ; mais que voulez vous ? C'est la guerre." If you hear that once, you hear it a dozen times a day.

If I am ever asked where I live in Troyes I say " chez Madame Paton, à l'imprimerie." But perhaps they don't know it, and then if I am pressed for time I say shortly " Rue Geoffroi." But if I have plenty of time to spare I answer thus : " My hostess, Madame Paton, has a front door which opens on to Rue - Général - Saussier - mille - huit - cent - vingt-huit-à-mille-neuf-cent-cinq, but the private door I use opens on to Rue Geoffroi de Villehardouin-Chroniqueur - mille-cent-soixante - sept - à - mille - deux - cent - vingt - huit."

Time waits, not only on speech, but on

## THE CANTEENERS

trams in Troyes—unlike England, where Time and Tide wait for no man. It would often be quicker to walk the two miles to Croncels than to go in the tram, not because the tram creeps, because it doesn't—when it isn't standing still it goes quite fast—but because it spends most of its time waiting at spots where there are double lines for another tram to pass by. I have waited a quarter of an hour for this to happen, and by a curious mischance I am invariably in the tram which waits, and not in the one which is waited for. Then there is the Bureau de Poste, where endless Time waits its turn to be wasted. I have seen, in the space of a quarter of an hour, at least five hours of Troyes time being wasted, at four *guichets*, each with a long tail of people waiting their turn to be attended to, with unvarying patience. Most of the business done is in registered letters and parcels sewn up in white calico for soldiers at the front. Each parcel takes about ten minutes of steady writing in a book before it is finally stamped, post-marked, and thrown into a basket; then

## THE BUREAU DE POSTE

the payment has to be calculated and made, then the next person moves along in front of the *guichet*. When there are fifteen in front of you it takes a good while to call for your letters. Not very long ago a sharp-witted person in France suddenly discovered that for months and months a steady supply of cotton had been going into Germany, as all parcels for the French prisoners had been sewn up in white cotton; now that has been stopped, and parcels are wrapped in paper.

In the tram to-day an oldish man, after looking at me earnestly for some time, slid along the seat nearer to me and began asking me if I was working at St. Bernard. When I had told him I was at Quai-Croncels, and what work we were doing, he burst out, “ Ah, Madame, cette bataille de la Marne—les soldats anglais, c’est l’Angleterre qui a sauvé la France.’ ” He kept repeating it, and put his hand out and clasped mine, and when it came time for him to get out he shook my hand again and bowed and hurried out speechless.

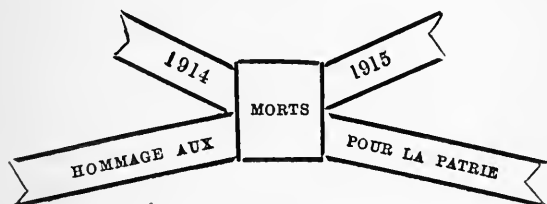
# THE CANTEENERS

## LA TOUSSAINT.

All Saints' Day (a public holiday) and All Souls' Day (*le jour des Morts*) are over. Both have been raw, wet, and gloomy, with the unspeakable chalky mud of Champagne Pouilleuse under foot. It is hard, because La Toussaint is almost the greatest day of the year in France, specially a day of family reunion; and this year doubly so on account of the many losses by death. For days past every tram has been crowded with women carrying wreaths, bouquets, and pots of chrysanthemums: almost every other shop in the town, whatever it usually sold, displayed flowers, real and artificial, plants, mostly heather and chrysanthemums, wreaths and trophies of beads and glass, metal urns and pots. I saw a regiment of soldiers march out of the barracks on the way to the cemetery, each man carrying a pot or bunch of flowers. I too wended my way to the cemetery. Useless to think of getting into a tram—every one was crammed to overflowing with people and pots. So I tramped along

## ALL SAINTS' DAY

in the mud. Needless, too, to ask one's way—one followed the pots and the wreaths. The avenue that led to the cemetery was lined on each side, like the road to San Lorenzo and the Campo Santo in Rome, with banks and piles of flowers for sale. Inside the first thing that caught one's eye was a great round bed of chrysanthemums surrounded by all sorts of trophies and wreaths; the most important had a bow with this device on it:



I wondered how many bows there would be in the knot before war is over.

A piece of ground had been set apart for soldiers: one became aware on the left of a fluttering mass of red, white, and blue. A place about the size of four tennis courts was planned out in long rows of neat graves, with little wooden edges, a plain white cross at the head of each and a tri-colour

## THE CANTEENERS

flag fastened to the cross. All the graves were smothered in flowers; the whole scene somehow struck me as being indescribably gay—not like a cemetery, not like the “*jours des morts*,” rather like a pageant, a military review, a day of rejoicing. The little flags were so clean and fresh and young-looking, they fluttered so courageously, so cheerfully, it almost seemed to me that the dead were rejoicing that they lay so still and quiet after the din of battle, so painlessly after all their sufferings, so peacefully after the disappointments and troubles and suspense of life. “*Morts pour la Patrie*,” wept over and tended and remembered by France. Could anyone wish a better end? If those young lives had not ended like that, could they have ended better?

A railway man with “*Est*” on his cap came and ranged himself beside me; his tears dropped freely. Unabashed, he murmured, “*Ah ! les pauvres ; non, non, les heureux, les heureux.*” He had lost a son at the battle of the Marne; and all these dead soldiers who rested in the soil beneath

## THE COAL SUPPLY

our feet were those who had died in the hospitals of Troyes after the battle of the Marne, and in the fourteen months of fighting in the Champagne country since.

By the end of the week the sheet worry has nearly ceased to disturb us, though I have an occasional deputation to ask for a receipt, which I refuse to give, as it isn't I who have the sheets. If I give a receipt, I may be asked later to produce them. We have had a coal worry, but that, I hope, has now crystallised itself. It began by our good Colonel giving us permission to use coal which apparently he had no jurisdiction over. I gather that after a time the cooks at our station, from whose store our soldier replenished our coal-box, got into trouble for using so much coal. A coal-general, or some sort of luminary, descended upon us and told us it was impossible we should use that coal till a higher authority, in whose province the coal lay, had given his permission ; it was merely a formality, and would unquestionably arrange itself immediately. It didn't, how-

## THE CANTEENERS

ever, and meantime our soldier filched coke for us and broke up packing-cases. I pointed out to the coal-luminary that one could not make bricks without straw, and at last one morning coal appeared in our box. We are now told that when a train is expected the cooks have orders to provide us with coal, but on a day when no train is forthcoming we may only have coke and wood.

Simultaneously with this trouble our servant Bourgeot was suddenly deprived of his *nourriture*. The cooks found out he had been dining with the forty odd men who made up the *personnel* of Quai Croncels without their receiving his rations, and the sergeant said he could not countenance his being nourished there any more till he had received orders. So poor Bourgeot tramped off twice a day to a restaurant in the town and nourished himself at his own expense. I felt it was better not to interfere, as feeding him was not our business, but after four days of this I did go round and interview the Colonel both on the subject of Bourgeot's nourishment and our coal supply. He is a dear man—ample, generous, large-





## THE *EMDEN*

hearted. All difficulties were swept away with a comprehensive wave of both arms. He literally sweeps all troubles away to the winds. All is now well, but I shall make it my business to find out if Bourgeot has been indemnified against his outlay.\* He beamed two or three days ago, because for the first time he had received his pay at the increased amount : it used to be  $\frac{1}{2}d.$  a day, and from October 1, 1915, it became  $2\frac{1}{2}d.$  I have not told any of them what our men get.

Mrs. Sollas told me how narrowly they escaped the *Emden*, coming home from Australia. They were warned at Bombay that she was in the neighbourhood, and about twenty-four hours out the captain received a wireless telling him to put back to Bombay. For some reason he disbelieved the message, asked to have it repeated in code ; but no reply came, so he continued his voyage to Aden, keeping a very sharp look out. Afterwards he found no message had ever been sent him, and in all probability if he had gone back he would

\* After a fortnight he had not been reimbursed, so I paid him myself.

## THE CANTEENERS

have walked straight into the jaws of the *Emden*. No doubt it was a trap.

The woods are nearly bare of leaves. Day by day the great avenues of poplars have shown more and more clearly the huge colonies of lumps of mistletoe, which look in the distance like gigantic rooks' nests. A fortnight ago, one sunny day when we penetrated far into the woods along the Seine, the tops of the poplars (not Lombardy poplars) were hung all over with a delicate tracery of golden yellow—each leaf glittered and trembled in the sun like gold. And looking through the delicate grey stems of the nearer trees one saw beyond other lines of more distant poplars, each with a fine cloud of golden dust hovering among the topmost branches. Behind, a deep stormy blue of banks of clouds low on the horizon. In front the Seine flowed gently between banks edged with guelder-rose and crimson-leaved cornel, and the clean grey poplar stems rose out of a tangle of red and scarlet bramble leaves.

## THE WASHERWOMEN

On the bank, below the wooden bridge we stood on, two old women in faded blue gowns scrubbed their linen in the river, each kneeling in a wooden box, and shouted questions up to us as to what we were doing, why we were there, and where we came from. When we said we were *infirmières* and worked for the *blessés*, they said, "Mon Dieu, que vous êtes braves."

Yet probably, if their lot had been to live and do their work in a bombarded village, they would callously have washed daily at the river, with shells falling in the neighbourhood, and not have deemed it brave.

If the French woods were within speaking distance of the English market at Christmas time I could make my fortune by selling mistletoe. We often try to pick some, but it is always out of reach, and the bare, smooth poplar trunks do not lend themselves to swarming up in a nurse's cloak. But we have a pet soldier who arrives at our canteen sometimes completely hung round with great branches of

## THE CANTEENERS

it tied to a pole over his shoulder ; he looks like a man as trees walking, and I told him he was illustrating a Shakespeare play. Inside and out our canteen is hung with huge lumps of it.

On the wide shelf outside in the winter live a party of wooden soldiers, jointed and supplied with bayonets, each dressed in the uniform of his country. We have a Tommy, a Piou-Piou, a Russian, a Belgian, an Italian, and a Boche. Every soldier at Quai-Cronceels, every cook, guard, *infirmier*, *menuisier*, *peintre*, *facteur*, *vague-mestre* ; even occasionally the doctors, officers, and visitors, amuse themselves by arranging these figures in battle array. Always the Boche is hopelessly outnumbered ; generally he is arranged doing the goose-step in self-conscious pride, while the Allies either threaten him with drawn bayonet behind, or are in ambush in the surrounding woods (pots of young fir trees and moss). Often the Boche is in his favourite position of arms held aloft, while he shrieks “ Kamerad, Kamerad ! ” Or he lies outstretched down on the ground,

## THE BISHOP'S BLESSING

with every bayonet of his foes planted in his breast.

The men never seem to tire of this game, and nearly every time I arrive I find a new battle progressing.

An Anglican bishop, on a visit to the Front in Flanders, motoring one day along a road encountered a regiment of French soldiers returning to the trenches. He stopped his car, and begged the officers' permission to bless the men before they returned to their dangerous duty. Having got out of the car, he raised his hands over the soldiers, and said solemnly but genially, "Dieu vous blesse, mes enfants."

I was pleased to find one day a shop near the market which sold delicious-looking crisp tin loaves—the kind one buys to cut sandwiches from. I bought a loaf, and took it with me to the canteen, thinking to indulge in the treat of hot buttered toast. We used every implement we had, including a tin-opener, a hammer, a saw, and a case-opener, but nothing would pierce the

## THE CANTEENERS

crust of that loaf. It turned out to be special prisoners' bread ! baked so slowly and thoroughly that it was crust, or rusk, right through, and consequently would keep without going mouldy for months. We did eat some, though it was a great strain on one's teeth, and as rusk with plenty of butter it was very nice.

In the course of my labours I have to interview all sorts of people : unfortunately they are nearly all of the *bourgeoisie*, so I fear my French will become very provincial, and when I next go to Paris I shall hardly be understood. We learn expressions and phrases from the soldiers and never know if they are slang or not. Apart from generals, *commandants d'étape*, colonels, captains, *médecins*, and *médecins-chef*, I have had to deal with electricians, *fumistes*, *menuisiers*, *imprimeurs*, photographers, chemists, ironmongers, bankers, sergeants, *infirmiers*, military censors, and franchise officials, wholesale tobacco-nists, grocers, merchants, and *pain d'épice* and biscuit manufacturers, not to speak of every kind and shape and sort of railway

## A KODAK SEANCE

official connected with the goods department of the railway.

Yesterday I had an amusing evening. I have just acquired a Kodak camera, and as I don't understand a single thing about photography I asked Madame Paton if her son would give me a little help in learning the ways of the machine. So after dinner I went through into the next house, where Madame Paton, junior, has her *ménage*, and we all sat round a large table, with a big chandelier overhead and a red rep tablecloth, in the most approved early Victorian style—Madame, junior, young and buxom and very good-looking, at one end, Madame, senior, old and bent and withered, at the other. Myself and young Monsieur Paton, who is a “simple soldat,” and extremely good-looking and well set-up, at one side and opposite us the parents of Madame, junior. I found myself obliged to translate aloud into French the book of rules of the Kodak game, and I must say it strained my French resources. They all listened devoutly, and almost without a smile, while I made hashes of such words as

## THE CANTEENERS

spring, hinge, lens, reel, film, focus, sight adjustment, and so on, but in the end we worried it out pretty well between us.

These old houses are all very Victorian. My room is panelled at one end, and the rest is hung with a fine old cretonne ; the floors are uneven, and of old polished oak ; my bed is an old double mahogany one. Young Madame has a beautiful bedroom. I went through it last night on my way to her dining-room—a wide expanse of dark polished floor, with no carpet ; good old furniture, and a great poster mahogany bed, hung with soft green satin curtains.

Old Madame told me that during and after the Franco-German war my room had been occupied by a Prussian officer. He had been quartered upon the family for two years, and, though of course they hated having him, he had always behaved with entire discretion and respect. The Prussian army occupied Troyes for two whole years, and as instalments of the indemnity were successively paid they withdrew from town after town, till finally Verdun was the last occupied spot of French territory.

## PERILS OF THE PATH

It isn't very nice walking home from our canteen in the middle of the night—unless it is moonlight. There are no lights left burning at all; and whether one chooses the road or the path, each has its peculiar pitfalls. The road has large holes in it, which fill with water after rain, and the points of the tramlines are badly joined, and the lines themselves stand up at times above the roadway and catch unpleasantly an unwary toe. The path is even worse; there are puddles there too, but not quite so deep. But the worst thing is that each house has a private waterway between the end of its drainage pipe from its roof and the gutter along the roadway, and, instead of being conducted by a pipe or culvert underground, the water flows to the road in a little trench, which is either paved with bricks or simply cut down into the soil. On a dark night it isn't possible to see them at all, and one's progress is a series of stumbles, splashes, slips—and language—about every twenty feet.

One day our *médecin-chef* came in beam-

## THE CANTEENERS

ing. I can't think, or could not at the time, why he came. Ostensibly he came to dry his hands, that he had washed at the pump, on our towel, and incidentally informed us, beaming, that he was treating himself to a special *déjeuner* with his wife. We have since heard that he has just been given a military medal, and the lunch was in honour of this. He wanted our sympathy in anticipation—*escargots* ! He was going to lunch on *escargots*, very special, yellow ones, from the south of France, ancient Romans, I think he said. He beamed and expanded. “ You catch them and place them in a well-warmed and lighted apartment, and for three weeks you *starve* them.” “ Oh, Monsieur,” we said, “ how cruel ! ” “ Not at all,” he replied, “ they taste better that way. Next you boil them in milk, and when they drop out of their shells you chop them up, mix them with cream and butter and green flavourings, such as mint, parsley, sage. They must be eaten *boiling* hot, and when they are served you pick out the contents with a special fork. Of course,” he continued

## ESCARGOTS

airily, "I am not gourmand, moi, I only eat one dozen and half—a gourmand he eat four five dozen."

"What a lovely *déjeuner*," we murmured. "We hope you and your wife will enjoy it. Bon appétit, Monsieur!"

"Merei," he replied, "but *that* is not the *déjeuner*, that is only the *hors d'œuvre*. After that we have jambon, mouton, dinde, salade, pâtisserie, dessert!"

He swelled himself again, and beamed at us and departed.

In mid-November we are just beginning to realise the convenience of working in a wooden hut which has been run up in five days, and of which all the wood has shrunk visibly since. The weather has been very wet the last few days, and our soldier has decided he had better sleep under an umbrella, and have maeintosh sheeting fastened to the wall behind his bed to keep out the "*courant d'air*." We were obliged this morning to move and examine every single case of stores we possess, as the rain was coursing all over the floor. In opening a case we believed to be ship's biscuits we

## THE CANTEENERS

found a long-lost treasure—a dozen or more large tins of Huntley and Palmer's fancy biscuits, which had been sent by a friend to Mrs. Sollas, and which she feared had gone to Le Tréport instead. All the boxes now are stood upon wooden blocks high and dry out of the swirling floods.

One of the *infirmiers* has just passed his examinations and become the first grade of *médecin*. So the *personnel* of the station had a feast; they had soupe cresson, in the making of which we assisted; then vermicelli; then fillet of beef, salade, petits pois, pâtisserie, extra good wine, and finally coffee with rum in it. I do not call that bad rations for “simples soldats.”

We helped in the making of the soup, because I had begged the *chef* to show me how it was made. He sent us in a canful one day, and we had all thought it so good. So we all went in to the kitchen and had a lesson, and gave him an English lesson in return. For those who have plenty of watercress I recommend it.

Melt a piece of butter the size of a walnut

## SOUPE CRESSON

in a frying pan—throw in three handfuls of cress, let them reduce to one-third as you toss them about ; add three more. When reduced add six large potatoes cut up, and salt ; put them all into a saucepan with a quart and a half of water. Boil till soft enough to pass through a colander. Then add milk and a walnut of butter, and serve.

N.B.—The *chef* used cocoa butter for frying the cress in, because cheaper than butter. Nut margarine would do, of course.

Bourgeot spent his afternoon next day bringing me small driblets of coal to my lodgings. Even if you can buy coal, which is difficult, you can't get it delivered, as horses, carts, and labour are all scarce. So Bourgeot is making several journeys and bringing what he can in a bag. It is necessary, as the weather is bitterly cold. Mrs. Sollas was so hard up the other day that when she succeeded in running some coal to earth, she carried seven kilos off with her in a bag !

Even when some coal can be procured to go on with, the stove will refuse to work.

## THE CANTEENERS

On the very coldest day of all I was reduced to a hot-water bottle, placed alternately at my feet and on my lap, because although I had a whole scuttleful of best anthracite with hardly any coke in it, the stove was possessed by a devil. Three several times it was lighted ; delicate sticks of charcoal placed on pieces of rag dipped in petroleum, and reverently fed with tiny bits of coal, a piece at a time, like feeding a very sick man. Yet, after burning fitfully and sadly, each time it slowly went out. Other days, when there is scarcely any coal to feed it with, it will burn fiercely and madly.

Troyes is somewhat fantastic in its nomenclature of shops. You have a pastry-cook who calls himself “ Au fidèle Berger ” ; a draper, “ Aux 100,000 Paletots ” ; and a boot shop styled “ La Chaussure de Luxe ” ; a baker calls himself “ Le Petit Troyen,” and a blouse shop “ Aux Bonheur des Dames ”—“ Au Grand Chic.”

Several shops put out this enticing notice, “ Ici on consulte le Bottin.” I long wondered who M. Bottin was, and wished to

## THE WAY OF RETURN

consult him in leisure moments. Was he a doctor, a chiropodist, or a palmist? I know now that he is a directory, but I was glad that I refrained from consulting him, for M. Bottin, they assured me, was a beer.

“The way of transgressors is hard.” So is the way of return from France to England in war time. France does not want to lose you; England does not want to receive you. But neither does France want you back, if you once leave her soil. She is quite clear about that.

It took me hours of patient effort to try and get a “permission” to come back to Troyes after going over to England for my son’s wedding. I started a good ten days beforehand, and visited every bureau I could hear of, beginning with the *état-major*, passing on to the Direction of the Service de Santé, being handed on with a polite letter to the *médecin-chef*, M. Bergasse, who read the letter, destroyed it, wrote another one, and handed me on with it to the *Commandant d’étape*. But even he failed me: all were courteous, friendly,

## THE CANTEENERS

and painstaking, and all professed their delight at seeing me back at Troyes again, but no one would take the responsibility of giving me the necessary *permission de retour*. The *Commandant d'étape*, I am certain, funk'd an interview. I saw the *capitaine d'étape*, whom I knew quite well, and I gathered from his embarrassed manner that the commandant was behind the folding doors all the time, though he sent a polite message that he was regrettably and unavoidably absent !

So I left Troyes and have no means of knowing whether I shall ever succeed in getting back. I did get a military *sauf-conduit* out of the *état-major* with considerable trouble, only to be told at the station when I left that I need not have bothered about it as my Red Cross railway pass was sufficient. Troyes is in the "*zone des armées*," and everyone has to have permission to leave it—civilians from the *mairie*, the military from the *état-major*. The *commandant* de Waubert at the *état-major* has a curious liking for making travellers to Paris go round by Sens, which

## SLOW TRAVELLING

in the only train there is now takes nine hours. I was terribly afraid he would write "par Sens" across my *sauſ-conduit*. But I was saved that. Even with going to Paris in an express, which was only three quarters of an hour late, it took me from Sunday afternoon to Wednesday evening to reach London.

If civilians *will* travel in war time they must expect to be kept a whole day in Paris to get their passports *visés*; they must not be surprised if there is a break down on the main line, and they are taken a slow circuitous route which brings them in to Boulogne, after an eight-hours' journey, an hour after the boat has left for Folkestone; neither ought they to be annoyed to find that that particular way across the Channel was closed to the public from the day before, and that the authorities tried to send them back to Dieppe. Rather ought they to be very thankful that the courtesy and persuasiveness of the M.L.O. officer on the quay succeeded in overcoming the red tape of the South Eastern Railway chief and persuading him

## THE CANTEENERS

to give them a promise that they should cross the following afternoon. And they ought to be (and were) very grateful to said M.L.O. officer for recommending a decent and moderate hotel to spend the night in. And they ought to be (and were) very grateful for being allowed to cross (even in a gale) in a troopship, carrying 600 men going home on leave, even though they were required to remain below all the voyage ; even though the ladies' cabin was found to be crowded with sleeping forms of muddy officers straight out of the trenches and occupying every available inch ; even though every ordinary convenience had been removed till the Days of Peace come once more, such as stewardesses, carpets, cushions, chintz covers, and so on. Life-belts there were, dealt out to each person ; and stewards there were, and very busy they were kept. And storm pans there were too, but whether there were enough to go round the 600 men who covered every available spot on deck or gangway and sat two deep on every available chair and stair I cannot say, because I was not allowed on

## THE GARDENERS OF TROYES

deck, and by the time a scratch committee had been collected up in the smoke-room of doctors and passport examiners, and we were summoned to go before them, it was pitch dark, and all the troops had departed to London by a special.

And another thing civilians ought to be thankful for, *but were not*, was that *only* about 150 P. and O. passengers were allowed on board at the last minute, who had travelled overland from Marseilles, and that *only* three babies were of the party; and that of those three babies, who howled all the way across, *only* one of them shared the same straw bolster.

I am sometimes afraid the supply of packing paper that is used for prisoners' and soldiers' parcels may run short, because the French have suddenly begun using it in large quantities for wrapping up their plants and bushes in the gardens for the winter. It is the universal habit at Troyes. The first garden we saw decorated in this fashion we concluded was a lunatic asylum—every plant of every size, every rose bush

## THE CANTEENERS

and tree and small shrub, was wrapped in coloured waterproof paper and tied neatly and firmly round the waist with twine. The colours were tastefully arranged. One path would have alternate pink and green on one side and purple on the other, the parcels resembling huge cabbage heads. Another bed might be nothing but green and white, or there would be a series of black shiny blobs varied with yellow and orange. The larger bushes, young conifers, and peach or almond trees, were swathed in straw. The gardens, thus prepared for the winter, looked neat and interesting, but hardly beautiful. About this time the pump outside our hut was also arrayed in its winter dress, even its handle being so thickly twisted round with straw that it is thicker than a man's arm and the pump itself thicker than a fat German's body. It appears that Troyes always expects a cold winter, and is quite prepared to have its main water supply and its gas cut off by frost. Those who depend on gas fires and gas light feel rather apprehensive, as all weather prophets foretell an unusually cold winter.

## PASSPORTS AND PERSONALITIES

When I was applying for my *sauf-conduit* I had to fill up a paper with description of my appearance, height, age, birthplace, etc., and I was sent with it into an inner room in company with two sergeants. We sat down at a table—I on one side, they on the other—and earnestly discussed my personal appearance. The difficulty was that my passport which already contained all these details, and which we might otherwise have copied, had already gone on in front to the *état-major*. So we had to describe me afresh, and hoped the two would tally. We all agreed about fair hair and blue eyes, only I suggested blue-grey, but was out-voted. Then came nose, mouth, chin, shape of face; the two sergeants studied me attentively and conscientiously, and though I gave them every possible help, and even suggested suitable words such as “*ordinaire*,” they would not acquiesce, and finally decided that the more elegant word “*moyen*” applied to chin, nose, and mouth, and wrote down that I had no distinguishing marks.

Anyway, the thing worked; but I should

## THE CANTEENERS

be sorry to have to identify anybody by the paper those two sergeants made out.

Here are two more long-winded streets at Troyes, which I noted down in passing :

“ Rue - Charles - Fichet - Dessinateur - Archéologue - 1817—1903.”

“ Rue - Charles - Dutreix - Fabricant - de - Bonneterie-Député-de-l'Aube-1848—1899.”

I had a letter from Bourgeois which ended thus :

“ Please to accept the homage of the profound respect with which I have the honour to be, L. BOURGEOIS.”

TROYES,

*Dec. 17, 1915.*

Back at Troyes, having been away from November 28 till December 16—two weeks and a half, out of which almost one week was taken up in going to and fro. From rue Général Saussier home to Roke, four days all but three hours; from Roke to rue Général Saussier, two days and three-quarters. The public can travel if it likes, but neither at its own time nor its own convenience. The

## THE FOLKESTONE CROSSING

worst thing about the journey was the delays. We got to Folkestone beautifully ; then, after a sort of Black Hole of Calcutta business outside the passport office, while I should imagine the officials, instead of sitting waiting for us at their post, were being called, shaving and breakfasting at leisure, while we hapless passengers remained outside the door flattened and compressed ever more densely by the converging crowd behind. . . . My sentence has grown out of all bounds. We will start a new one. We, the first trainload, got through at last to the boat, and I managed to secure a berth up against a porthole ; but the second trainload of people, whom we were able to watch going through all their convolutions, had to put up with accommodation on the floor. There was a crowd of people, and certainly we had the smallest steamer in the British Empire to cross in. I suppose the idea is if the boat has to be mined or torpedoed it may as well be only a small loss.

We reached Folkestone at 10.30. We did not leave it till 1.30. All that time we might have got most of the crossing over.

## THE CANTEENERS

For nearly five hours I held out against the horrible assortment of noises that sea-sick ladies can make. It was too rough to get down off one's bunk, as one could not have stood up, and the floor was covered with paralysed and convulsed forms—those who feared they would die, and those who feared they wouldn't. Every few minutes the bows came down with such a thud upon the water that it sounded like a violent explosion each time, but I am thankful to say nobody screamed. But it was easy to imagine them to be mine explosions.

At Dieppe an officer came below and ordered us all up on to the starboard deck—we supposed for passport examination again. But we were simply kept waiting there, in the dark and in the rain, jammed close together by people always crowding closer behind, for about an hour. The barrier was kept closed, and no one could imagine why we were not allowed to land. Perhaps the passport committee was having tea. At last came the welcome order, "Military off the boat first," and by virtue of my uniform I crushed out with a handful

## BUREAU-HUNTING

of soldiers who were on board. The first question put to me was, "Why did you not obtain a *permis de séjour* at Troyes?" How they found out I had not got one I can't imagine. The only answer I could think of was, "I suppose because I did not ask for one." This did not seem to satisfy, and I was firmly told that I must apply for one directly I got back to Troyes. I did not see why I should be trampled on, so I said I had never been told by anyone that it was necessary. But *how* did they know? The moment they opened my passport they pelted the question at me, as though they had been awaiting my arrival. Have I a black mark against my name?

The next *contretemps* was that I and four English Tommies who were bound for the other side of Paris were all told to go up into the town to exchange our *ordres de transport* for tickets. That is the worst of travelling with a military pass—you are always having to search out military bureaux, which take a pleasure in hiding themselves in obscure corners, and waiting on very insecure chairs while your passport

## THE CANTEENERS

is again examined ; a clerk proceeds to write out a long complicated form in duplicate which you have to sign, and which has to be countersigned always by some invisible person who is either to be found in an inner room or somewhere outside out of sight. From experience I knew this would take much time, especially for five people, so I treated myself and the four Tommies to a cab ; it was pouring with rain, and we were also afraid of missing the train. We need not have feared ; the train did not leave for two hours, and we got back and had an excellent dinner on it before even we started from the port. They certainly gave a good dinner for five francs :

|                     |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Barley soup.        | Bombe of ice. |
| Tarts of foie gras. | Cheese.       |
| Savoury rice.       | Fruit.        |
| Chickens.           | Coffee.       |
| Peas.               |               |

Reached Paris at midnight, instead of 9.50, which fellow-passengers said was very good, as it was often 2 or 3 in the morning.

The result of the protest at Dieppe was

## OFFICIAL CATECHISMS

that the first day I got back to Troyes I presented myself at the *mairie* and asked for a *permis de séjour*. They looked at my passport and Red Cross papers, and said, "Why do you want one? It is not necessary; you are authorised to be here by the French Red Cross." I explained what had taken place at Dieppe. Somewhat unwillingly they said I could have it if I liked, and directed me to another bureau hidden inside an *octroi*, where I again made my application and finally overcame official reluctance. Forms were produced, my papers laid out, and a searching catechism followed. The details asked for were puerile. How could it help the war for them to know my father's name, my mother's maiden name and Christian name, my husband's age and occupation; and where both he and I were born? The official could not grasp any of the names or places. I had to write them all down for him on a piece of paper, from which he copied them letter by letter on to his form—Old Charlton, Kent, Powell, Marten, Thomas, Edgbaston, Charles Wolryche, etc., etc.

## THE CANTEENERS

Then we came to personal details. Was I married ? When I said " Yes " he looked doubtful and distressed, and I could see the idea working in his mind. If I was married, why was I not at home minding my *ménage* ? The next question was, had I any children ? But without waiting for me to answer he drew a line through that column, and when I firmly said " Yes, I have three," he swivelled round in his chair, gazed helplessly at me, threw out his hands and waved them several times in the air, as though to say, " These English are beyond me ; if she has children, why is she not with them ? "

" Majeurs ou mineurs ? " he queried.

" Deux majeurs et un mineur," I replied. He again gesticulated silently. Finally he turned himself back to his form and firmly drew another line through the space left for *enfants*. After that we got on splendidly, and he wrote submissively anything I liked to tell him. He did ask at the end if my husband was also in Troyes, and when I said " No " he only made one little shrug, as though to say, " A woman who has

## RED TAPE BEATEN

deserted home and children would of course *not* have her husband out here with her."

I breathed a sigh of relief. It was done, and I signed my name and prepared to depart. But not at all: he proceeded to write it all out again in duplicate, and I had to sign that too. One paper was presented to me, and I was requested to return with it to the *mairie*. But before I went I let drop a bomb on his head.

"Monsieur," I said, "I have three other English ladies with me at my canteen, and besides that there are two other canteens at Troyes, with eight English ladies working in them. Shall I tell them all to come to you for *permis de séjour*?"

He turned quite pale. "For Heaven's sake, Madame," he cried (or words to that effect), "do nothing of the kind. I assure you, un *permis de séjour* est facultatif. Ce n'est pas obligatoire, du tout, du tout, du tout," his voice rising in shrill *creseendo*.

I felt I had got the best of that episode.

Now back to the *mairie*, where my paper was taken and carefully copied, English spelling and all, into a book, and a fresh

## THE CANTEENERS

form was taken out and filled in, given to me to keep, with a space in it for a photograph, which I was asked to provide. This I firmly but suavely refused. I hadn't got any, and if I had — They then suggested tearing one out of the three or four I had plastered on my passport and identification papers, but I told them to tamper with a passport in war time was high treason in England, and I could not think of permitting it ; so they gave way on that point, and drew a line over where the photograph ought to be. Now it seemed to be really finished. I was charged to keep all the papers carefully, and we parted, doubtless mutually hoping never to meet again.

### CHRISTMAS.

This is not much of an affair in France ; the churches keep it by midnight services and masses ; some of them have a decorated and illuminated *crèche* somewhere near or behind the altar. They are rather prettily arranged, though somewhat theatrical in effect, with fairy lights in saucers to give the necessary light ; there are usually

## CHRISTMAS

about eight figures, Mary, Joseph, St. John the Baptist and the three magi, and sometimes three shepherds as well. The child, laid on straw in a manger, is nearly always at least three times too large in proportion.

A good deal is done for the wounded soldiers, too, rather as a custom adopted from the English. We selected an out-of-the-way military hospital, which did not seem to be having anything done for it, and asked permission to give the men presents all round. They were very grateful. We made up eighty parcels, in blue, white, and scarlet paper : each had a small present—pocket-book, knife, tobacco-pouch, or purse ; each had a piece of *pain d'épice*,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of chocolate, an orange, a packet of cigarettes, a tooth-brush, some postcards, and a large “*friandise*” (some kind of marzipan or chocolate pennyworth).

We went into each ward and gave them ourselves. The hospital was dull and cheerless : the walls were painted brown, and the beds had brown Army blankets as counterpanes. Our gaily coloured parcels made a delightful contrast to the sombre

## THE CANTEENERS

wards and the gloom of a pouring wet dark morning outside. Being a military hospital, there were no nurses, only orderlies.

“What do the men occupy themselves with?” I asked the captain who took us round. “Have they games, or books?”

“Alas, no,” he replied; “they buy themselves papers to read, but we cannot afford to get games for them.”

“May we send you some for an *étrenne* for the New Year? Games and packs of cards?”

His face lit up. “*Mais*, Madame, it would be too good of you. We should accept them gladly.”

The Red Cross hospitals are much pleasanter places. They are managed and run by the “Dames de France,” and are more like our English hospitals, being bright and cheerful, with red counterpanes, and nice nurses dressed in white.

At Troyes the Lycée had been turned into a Red Cross hospital and was admirably suitable, the big dormitories forming spacious sunny wards, and the gardens round the building ensuring quietness;

## HOSPITAL CHEER

the soldiers look contented and bright and cheerful. In the military hospitals they look apathetic, dreary, bored.

The men at Quai-Croncels marked Christmas by having a specially good dinner. We added to this a dessert in the form of oranges, apple tarts, and cigarettes, so that the complete menu was a very respectable one. We invaded the kitchen in the morning, as we and the cook-chef take a mutual interest in each other, and the turkey was liberated from the oven for a moment for our approval.

Our humble Christmas dinner was a contrast. We had barley soup, somewhat burnt, as we had had to leave it to itself while we went to the hospital; and cherry tart. We could not even leave Bourgeot to mind the soup like King Alfred, as he was occupied in wheeling our eighty parcels along on a handcart, packed in two enormous marmites as the best method of keeping them dry in the pouring rain.

It does not quite always rain here, only nearly always. By to-day (the 29th) the

## THE CANTEENERS

roads had got nice and dry, and Dorothy and I went to outlying villages on an egg hunt. Eggs are still difficult to buy in the shops, as the hospitals take so many, but out in the country we can pick one or two up at the various cottages. Almost every cottager keeps fowls ; wherever we see any we go in and ask. To-day we were most successful and came home with twenty-two beautiful new laid eggs—most of them pullets' eggs, it is true. The Seine is all out in flood, and walks we are accustomed to take to the woods have disappeared under water.

Dorothy's activities are various : she teaches English at our station, and receives French lessons in return. Her pupils are the *sous-chef de gare*, Bourgeot, and a doctor major whom we call the Bison Boy, because the first time he came to see us he talked a little broken English and told us he was learning out of the " Bison Book." Tactful inquiries revealed the fact that he was trying to say the " Boy's Own Book." Dorothy writes out exercises for them to learn by heart, and hears them in turn every morning. The *sous-chef* learns the

## THE BISON BOY

quickest, but he cannot grasp the pronunciation, whereas Bourgeot pronounces very well. Dorothy's dictionary, which she brought with her to learn French from, is nearly always out on a visit. The Bison Boy grabs it in the morning, if it has come back from the *sous-chef*, who borrows it over-night to study while he is on night duty. Bourgeot endeavours to get the use of it for the evenings, when he is left alone at the canteen. The result is, when I say to her on a fine afternoon, "I think you must go on an egg hunt to-day," she replies, plaintively, "Oh, dear, I was just going to have a good go at my dictionary."

The *sous-chef* has a passion for making lists. He is at present copying out the dictionary\* (the English half of it), and is in the middle of the letter "C." To-day I lent him a book which contains lists of all the navies of the world, which he promptly began to copy out, and in a short time sent me round by the porter, Charles Robin (or it might be Robin Charles—he gives his name both ways, and says it does not

\* He finished it before we left Troyes.

## THE CANTEENERS

matter which we call him), a list he had compiled of all the ships which had been sunk during the war. A good many amenities take place between the *sous-chef's* bureau and the canteen: he develops and criticises our photographs and corrects Dorothy's French; he invites us to the warmth of his stove on days when we are only allowed coke; and on a wet afternoon entertains us with his stereoscopic photographs, of which he has taken many excellent ones at the French front.

A few days ago a railway notice arrived for me, informing me that eight cases awaited me at Troyes Station. I was not expecting more than two or three, so went down in the evening to investigate. But nobody could find any at all.

My particular friend, M. Colin, was off duty, and nobody else there has a head on his shoulders. So I made an appointment to meet him the next afternoon at 3, and asked the St. Luc ladies to meet me there as well, as *they were* expecting goods from London.

## THE EIGHT PACKING CASES

We all turned up, and M. Colin speedily found the group of eight cases. Three were for me, three for St. Bernard, the others for St. Luc. That was all plain-sailing, and we all noted down our respective numbers, and said we would send our *vaguemestres* to fetch them. I sent mine this morning, and he returned empty-handed with a message from the *chef de gare* to say I could not possibly have only three cases : eight cases I might have, but not three. In the meantime the St. Luc ladies, having found out by advice from London that their consignment consisted of 200 plum puddings, where they had only ordered fifty, took their *vaguemestre* with them, went down in force to the station, stormed and took possession of the platform, opened their cases, abstracted the puddings they wanted, repacked and sent away the rest, and retired in triumph. I did not see this episode ; I wish I had. But now, if I *were* to claim those eight packing-cases, how would the station-master justify his position ?

## THE CANTEENERS

NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1916.

We did not want to minister to our men's physical needs again, so for a change we gave them a variety of games to play in their leisure hours—draughts, dominoes, and cards—with which they seemed very pleased. These we presented during “*soupe*” on New Year's eve, and felt that now all the amenities were well over.

On New Year's morning we noticed that the men, instead of drifting out of their tent after “*soupe*” by twos and threes as usual, all came out in a body together, and made straight for our canteen. The door opened itself, as it were, and a large plant appeared in the doorway, propelled by the head sergeant, Jouzeau, and a perfect sea of faces was visible behind him. The plant was tastefully festooned with ribbons of the Allied colours, and it was presented to us by the sergeant on behalf of the whole station, and accompanied by a well-spoken and grateful little speech, in which he thanked us for all we had done and were doing. We shook hands with everybody

## NEW YEAR'S DAY

we could reach, and those who were too shy to come inside shook hands through the window. We all talked a great deal about the "Entente Cordiale" and "Le Bonheur du Nouvel An" and promised to be "Alliés pour toujours," and then the deputation departed. They have a special dinner again to-day, which includes *poulets* somewhere on its menu, and the Government gift of a bottle of champagne to every four soldiers, an apple and orange, and two cigars each.

A good many old friends who had been sent some time ago to another station, turned up and called upon us; one came in the middle of lunch, so we invited him to join us; we had reached the stage of chocolate *soufflé*, *mocha* cake and coffee, all of which he enjoyed. He brought me two souvenirs from the battlefield in Champagne where he had been for a week on *ravitaillement* duty (carrying medicinal and other Red Cross necessities to the field hospitals), a piece of shell from a *soixante-quinze* gun, and a piece of chalk in the shape of a tiny tombstone from the military

## THE CANTEENERS

cemetery of Vitry-le-François, on which he had carved his initials, the date, and the words “Mort pour la Patrie”; the whole thing was only an inch and a half high.

This man, Leopold Bourgeois, is delicate and probably dyspeptic; also possibly something of a “*malade imaginaire*.” He always talked a great deal to us about his *estomac*, and once asked for some boiling water to wash it with—whether externally or internally he did not say! We often used to cook him an egg or give him barley soup on days when he had “*mal d’estomac*.” He asked us to-day if we did not think he had got very thin since he had left here, and certainly he did seem to have become rather hollow below his chest. He smote himself gently in the *estomac*, and in the middle of his chocolate *soufflé* said quite calmly “You know I think I have a tapeworm (*solitaire*). I am always hungry and I eat, and eat, and eat, and I always get thinner.” Juliet said: “You look very well in your face; better than when you were here”; at which he looked

## BOURGEOIS AND BOURGEOT

rather disappointed, and said : “ Ah ! but *underneath* I am much thinner.”

Afterwards, when the two girls had gone out, Bourgeot came in, and he and Bourgeois conversed very intimately, to my great edification, on the subject of the possible presence of a *solitaire* and how best to deal with it. They were both entirely without any false shame.

*Jan. 4.* Again to-day it is like summer. I have had no fire in my room for three days, and the temperature is 60°, even in the evening with the window wide open. Dorothy and I have been for a walk and found ordinary indoor winter clothes too hot : it was a relief, when the sun went behind a cloud. Yet in London they told us only strong people ought to come to Troyes because it was such a very cold place.

*Jan. 10.* The last two days we have had a new kind of train passing us, going east : always we have trainfuls of troops, largely, I believe, *permissionnaires* going home ; but now it is trainfuls of young recruits, all

## THE CANTEENERS

still in civilian dress, going off to Verdun, where they are to receive their training—lads of seventeen, of the *dix-sept* class, cheering lustily as they pass our canteen, and waving their caps to us. How many of them will ever fight, I wonder? And what a strange place to choose for their training—Verdun, almost the first place in France to be attacked in this war, and the last place to be held by the German army of occupation in the war of 1870. At least these lads will learn to know the sound of guns.

*Jan. 11.* Yesterday afternoon we heard the guns plainly—so plainly that we almost thought it must be something else. But in to-day's paper is an account of a German attack in Champagne—an effort to take the Butte de Tahure from the French, which failed. That was what we heard.

Our castle of cards has fallen about our ears. Signs were not wanting that it was tottering; this morning it came down with a run. Perhaps the first sign was the lessening of work; the next was the rumour that the 2nd Army was going to leave Troyes; then the 19th Regiment

## REMOVAL FROM TROYES

left us, to whose colonel we owed our installation; next came rumours of the closing of the Evacuation Hospital. Then one morning we arrived to find the notice board of "2<sup>me</sup> ARMÉE" on our canteen had been removed in the night! The 2nd Army had vanished, leaving no trace behind it except our soldier Bourgeot; and the 107th Regiment took the place of the 19th. New, unfamiliar, unsympathetic faces met us everywhere; the station, which had blossomed like the rose, became a desert. And then there came a sergeant and fetched our Bourgeot away.

And that was the beginning of the end. The semi-final stage was that the *personnel* of the station was reduced by one half, and the final scene took place this morning, when at my request Captain Weill came round to let us know what decision the *Commandant d'étape* had come to about our work. We are to shut it up, and the canteen is to be moved bodily away to another hospital where it is badly wanted, and where we are to follow it, or not, as the spirit moves us.

## THE CANTEENERS

And in the meantime, after being untended for two days, and left to light our own fire, and scrub or leave unscrubbed our own floor, we are accorded the services of the dirtiest-looking man on the station, a shepherd of the name of Clément, but who is familiarly known to everyone as “Le Diable.” He is really a very nice man, and is perhaps not as dirty as he looks. He bounces into the canteen, uncouth and noisy, but willing; what he can fall over and knock into he does, and his voice is exactly like the barking of a dog, of his own sheep-dog. His other duties appear to be to wash up and fetch water for the cook and to be the butt of every other man on the station. His home occupation is that of a shepherd, and he has 450 sheep to tend. He is accustomed to work at all hours of the day and night, specially in lambing season, and he considers being a soldier is a very soft job. We think he has acquired a sheeplike face through long association with them.

The Troyens do not love their river, as we do ours; they look askance at it and



CLEMENT (LE DIABLE) AND PAUL GODET.



have banished it outside, where once their walls stood, and have made in its place through the middle of their city a wide, perfectly straight canal, with a fine avenue of trees on each side and shady walks underneath. The disregarded Seine wanders and meanders around half the city ; it loops and curves and curls and takes up as much room as it possibly can. It also divides itself up and probably joins its parts together again, out of pure perversity ; so that if you walk along a mile of road you cross seven times over a river, and each time you ask a passer-by what river it is, to be told always it is the Seine.

The Troyens adore bridges. Probably they have built canals for the pure pleasure of putting bridges over them, and they have certainly arranged their railway system on the same principle. If they can't get their canals to hold water, they just excavate ones that won't, and then throw a bridge across about every 100 yards. One is impelled to think that a Professor of Bridges lives at Troyes, and that his pupils build a bridge every term for practice.

## THE CANTEENERS

The countryside, then, consists of canals and railway bridges, and the looping of the Seine. If anyone wanted a pleasant holiday, he might hire a boat at Troyes and row steadily down the river for about a week, sleeping every night in the city. He would never have far to walk.

On the 16th we left Troyes for Héricourt. Juliet and I nearly missed our train, as the taxi she had ordered never came, and she had to dash down to Troyes in the tram and pick up the first one she could find, and then go the whole mile back to fetch her luggage. It was abominably greasy, and we dashed along and ran down a considerable part of the French Army and slid round corners, only to meet with exasperating slowness in the military bureau where they laboriously wrote out our *ordres de transport*. We were so occupied in waving flags and handkerchiefs to the whole *personnel* of Quai-Croneels as we passed through the station, and throwing out last souvenirs to them in the form of tins of cigarettes, that we nearly missed getting any *déjeuner*. The train certainly

## TO BELFORT

thought we were throwing bombs out of the window.

It was quite a change to have a meal we had not cooked for ourselves. It was a beautiful sunny day, and it was a pretty journey. As we neared Belfort it got colder, and snow lay lightly on the northern slopes ; in the distance to the north we could see snow-clad ranges.

We had two hours to wait at Belfort, so proposed to go and see the town. But we met with considerable resistance from the uniformed person who kept guard at the exit of the station, because we had not got *sauf-conduits* for the town. I did my best with him : I pointed out that we were Red Cross (no good) ; that we were English (no good) ; that we were Allies (no good) ; that we were travelling with a *sauf-conduit* from Troyes to Héricourt, signed by the commandant himself ! He began to waver here, so I pushed my advantage home. It would be so ennuyant at the station for two whole hours, and besides, we did so want some tea ! He shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and waved us through the turnstile.

## THE CANTEENERS

Troyes was of course in the "*zone des armées*," but Belfort is a yet inner shrine and is "*zone interdite*." There was nothing to do there except have tea at a shop of "*dégustation*," and look at the fort which is forbidden ground, and watch an aeroplane which was circling overhead. The German Taubes are incessantly trying to come over Belfort, but they are chased away.

We arrived at Héricourt Station to find nothing but a platform, a station-house, and an ambulance. The ambulance kindly offered itself, and it and we and an *éclopé* rattled together over awful roads to the "Hotel deux Clefs," which was expecting us. It was quite the most uncomfortable vehicle I have ever been in, worse even than the garden cart. If I were really *éclopée* or *blessée* I would prefer a wheelbarrow. The seats were very hard, and so high one's feet could hardly reach the ground.

Having left our luggage in the hotel, the ambulance took us on to the Dépôt d'Eclopés, where Miss Blaine has her

## A RELIEF PARTY

canteen. The state of affairs was even worse than I had been told. Miss Blaine, the directrice, was in bed with severe tonsillitis; two of her party had gone home, and the other, Miss Graham, was valiantly running the canteen with the occasional help of a French lady. I found there was enough to do to keep all my party of four busy, so I decided to telegraph back to Troyes at once for Mrs. Sollas and D. Knowles.

They arrived on the evening of the 20th, and I am glad of them, as it is hard work for two. Juliet and I were alone to-day, as the other ladies have now given the canteen over to us. The routine is this: Arrive at 8.30, start making a dish for about twelve to twenty-four men; they vary in number every day. It may be a pudding, or a vegetable: we provide what we like. The oven is very bad, and what would take an hour to cook in England takes two or three here. In the meantime, the big marmites are heating, and we start to make coffee. By 11 the dish we have made, and hot milk, have to be ready for

## THE CANTEENERS

those men who are on a special *régime* ; by 11.15 the whole lot come pouring out from their dinner to our canteen to be served with coffee—any number from 600 to 1,000. The doctor comes in every morning with a list of numbers, and signs the paper with the amount of tea, coffee, and sugar we are entitled to from the stores. The pouring out goes on as fast as we can pour till about 12.15, when it slacks off, and we can lay the table for lunch and eat what we can find time for : the men keep on coming, and sometimes we recognise the same man two or three times.

Almost immediately the afternoon dishes have to be made—two for the evening meal—and the water started heating for tea. Tea begins to be served from 2.30, and the great rush is from 3 to 4, when again it slacks off, and we can get our own. Then at 4.45 hot milk has to be ready for the *petite régime* when the *infirmiers* come in for the dishes. We may always go with our “ *plats* ” if we like and see the men eat them, and one can note which “ *plat* ” they seem to like best. If they like it very





THE CANTEN AT HÉRICOURT.

## ROUTINE AT HÉRICOURT

much there is an awful scuffle to get their tin dish handed up quick for more. I love going up and seeing the soldiers at their meals, and we go into the infirmary, too, when we like. The sorts of dishes we make are simple : rice, semolina, and sago puddings, lemon pudding, bread and butter pudding, apple and bread crumbs, stewed apples, prunes, cut up oranges, custard, etc.; also buttered eggs, poached eggs, *purée* of potatoes, cauliflower *au gratin*, cheese macaroni, etc., etc. Our dishes are supplementary; they do not form the whole meal, though certainly the larger half of it.

After their evening “*soupe*” at 5 the men are apt to try and sneak in again and get final cups of tea, but there is usually a sergeant about who comes to us and asks us to shut, so we murmur, “Captain’s orders, *il est défendu*,” and reluctantly shut down our shutters and turn the light out. The men may not drink the water; it is not “potable”: so they only get the drinks we give them and two “quarts” of wine a day. A “quart” is a quarter litre.

## THE CANTEENERS

D. Knowles applied to the *maire* for a *laissez-passer* to Belfort, and I went with her to help in case she got stuck. He made her pass out for her, and wrote down a description of her appearance, after a careful study of her features, instead of copying it out of her passport, as he had done in my case. Afterwards we tried to read what he had put, and found his writing almost indecipherable. Her hair appeared to be "chat," her complexion "drab," her height 167 feet, and her forehead we could make nothing of. So I appealed to the little Alsatian maid, Odile, to read the word for us. She looked at it, stammered, and blushed so furiously, but refused to say what it was, that we thought it must be something dreadful, like idiotic, or senile, or wanting; and we searched the dictionary in vain for a clue. Dorothy wanted to go back to the *maire* and ask him. But we found out in the end that the word was "*découvert*," and we found out also that the reason why Odile blushed and refused to speak was that she could neither read nor write! And she was born and brought

## SPRING ON THE HILL-TOP

up in German Alsace! What about *Kultur*?

It was a week later that we went a beautiful walk up one of the hills that is crowned by an outlying fort of Belfort. The view was magnificent, and we thought we could see the Hartmansweilerkopf. The wind was east, and the guns were continuous, and sounded rather louder than usual. It was as warm as May. At the top we found quantities of spring squill flowering among the dead leaves, also stinking hellebore and sweet daphne. Last Sunday a German aeroplane came over Héricourt, and the shots from the French guns bursting near it could be plainly seen.

I have offered a prize of a scarf to the first soldier who brings us a violet from the woods. We have found already oxlips, periwinkles, and coltsfoot and daphne, and the fields near the station are starred with daisies.

For two whole days all the men have been "C.B." or "*Consignés*." They have

## THE CANTEENERS

told us so each day at coffee with very long faces, and every evening when we go home, and are let out of the barracks by the guard, we are followed by the wistful eyes of half the dépôt, who stand with their faces pressed against the bars of the great gates, like animals at the Zoo—deprived of their liberty. It seems that they have been slow and unpunctual and slovenly, and the captain got into a rage and docked them of half their wine and all their liberty. The result was they drank more tea and coffee than usual, so *we* had to work harder !

We hear that on the 27th, the Kaiser's birthday, the Germans tried to break through the French lines at Delle, the frontier town between France and Switzerland ; and failed, fortunately for us, as Delle is not many miles away. The flare lights of the attack could be seen from here between 6 and 9 p.m. I think the French must be retaliating, as the rumble of the guns has been continuous the last two afternoons.

On a perfect cloudless morning in early February Dorothy and I started off at

## AMONG THE HILLS

8.30 up the hills with two and a half hours in hand before we need be at the canteen. There was hoar frost on the ground, but the sun was well up, and by the time we had reached the woodmen's hut we were glad to leave our coats in their charge and finish the climb without them.

Thin, delicate mist filled the valleys, and shrouded Héricourt at our feet ; but the hilltops rose clearly silhouetted against a pale blue sky. The larks would have been singing in England, but in France they shoot their larks and eat them in little pies, so even the woods were empty and still, except for the occasional screech of a magpie and the occasional hum of a bee visiting the catkins for pollen.

Near the crest we picked bunches of blue scilla, which was flowering freely among the dead leaves, and at the top the first violet. Violets and wild daphne growing up against the most murderous wire entanglements you can possibly imagine ! How could the violet choose such company ? But it had its back to them, and its little face was turned to the sun and the woods—perhaps

## THE CANTEENERS

it was unconscious of their proximity, and did not even hear the drone of the guns going on almost without ceasing. To the pure all things are pure, and perhaps the guns sounded to it like the distant humming of bees.

Dorothy said, "I want to go to the very top." Now the top is crowned by the fort, and I did not suppose we should be allowed close to it, as the ground is marked "Terrain militaire ; interdit au public." So when we met two soldiers we expected to be turned back at once, but it is always a good plan if you expect an attack to hurriedly attack first and so upset their strategy. I therefore asked if we might go on any farther, as we particularly wanted to see the view on the other side—it was in fact what we had come up for. The one soldier said, "It is *very* irregular," and looked extremely shocked ; the other, who was probably a lieutenant, offered to accompany us and show us where we might go. We accepted his offer gladly, and . . . he took us all over the fort !

## A VISIT TO A FORT

We saw the great deep moat that separated the inner fort from the outer, and from the inside we saw the guns that were fixed so as to rake every spot of it in case the enemy *did* set foot in it. We were conducted through long dim passages with iron doors at each end, lighted and aired by electricity. We were taken down a never-ending stairway to remote bomb-proof regions below, where there was a bakery and a butchery, enough stores to last three years, a huge room 300 metres long, furnished with two tiers of iron bedsteads, enough to lodge 800 men, and lighted by electric light, and warmed by stoves and aired by electric fans and huge pipes carrying fresh air from above. When we emerged again to the surface up a series of sloping tunnels we were shown the guns, with their piles of ammunition waiting ready, then the telephone and telegraph rooms, the guard-room, the prison, and finally we scrambled right up to the very top where our lieutenant pointed out to us the principal landmarks, and the other forts which ring Belfort round, and are all

## THE CANTEENERS

in communication with each other, and with the one we were on.

The place is absolutely deserted, but it could be very quickly manned, and would be, of course, if the Germans were ever to break through the French lines. Till then the troops are wanted elsewhere. We also learned how in the 1870-1 war a battle had raged in the valleys round Héricourt (January 26, 1871) and how Belfort had capitulated to the Germans. Above the station are still to be seen the emplacements the enemy made for their cannon.

*Feb. 8.* Yesterday at 3 I was in Belfort for the afternoon, having to go to the bank and do some shopping. To-day at 3 the Germans began bombarding Belfort with high explosive shells from an Austrian 42 cm. howitzer. I did not hear the first shell, but at 5.15 I was walking home along the Faubourg Montbéliard when I heard a tremendous bang. I thought it must be an aeroplane being fired at, but could see no sign of one; then I met an excited group of people, and asked them if they

## BELFORT BOMBARDED

knew what it was. Belfort is about eleven kilometres distant.

It was just a chance that I went to Belfort yesterday and not to-day. It happened that the men at the dépôt had been behaving very badly, staying out late, and going into the town after hours, among other enormities, so the captain cut them off, not only their wine, but their tea and coffee as well. At 11 he came to the canteen and ordered us to close our doors ! This practically gave us a holiday, except for some cooking, so I chose the opportunity of an afternoon in Belfort.

Already when I got back to the hotel some refugees had arrived, including a young woman who had walked over, wheeling her baby in a perambulator.

It was not till I had to lie in bed for several days in the grip of "*la grippe*," at the "pub" where we live on the main street of Héricourt, that I learnt what the noise could be in a village inn, in war time, on a main road not far from the front. I had never spent any part of the day in Héri-

## THE CANTEENERS

court before, as our canteen lies a mile out on a country road.

Out of doors there was, just those few days, February 11 to 16, an almost incessant passing by of troops, going to reinforce the front in the neighbourhood of Delle, where the Germans had begun an attack. Regiment after regiment passed by, with the usual accompaniment of army carts, field kitchens, guns, ammunition, Red Cross motors, and so on. A special lot of new motor vans, with R.V.F.\* painted on their green canvas covers, took a whole morning to go by. And a convoy of new cars, some hundreds, all marked with an English name, took the better part of a day. They were all Fords, and went comparatively quietly. The road under my window had just been newly metalled before I retired to bed, but had not been rolled in. My windows look on a side street, which comes down a fairly steep street from Lure and Vesoul, over the Vosges: convoys are very apt to stop just outside before turning into the main street, and

\* Ravitaillement de Viande Froide.

## VILLAGE NOISES

motors going the other way also change their gears just beneath my window.

All this, however, is beyond and above the ordinary every-day noises. About 5 a.m. the sirens and bells begin to clamour for the early workman, and he himself, in considerable numbers, accompanied by his sisters and daughters, tramps past shortly afterwards. The church bells ring at short intervals for services, and two clocks chime each quarter of an hour, one doing it twice over. The clocks are about five minutes apart, so that for really a considerable part of the twenty-four hours one can listen to bells and clocks.

The life of the inn begins at an early hour—sometimes shortly after midnight, when belated or lost soldiers hammer at doors or windows and clamour for food or drink or beds. But usually 6 is the hour when life stirs again. Through the drowsiness of early morning one is conscious of banging of doors, opening of windows, rattling of milk vans and bakers' carts; of weird noises connected with shutters being rolled up; of teacups and saucers; of

## THE CANTEENERS

monsieur's rich bass voice rolling about below like a barrel of old wine ; of coffee being ground ; of much violent banging and chopping going on in the kitchen. I have come to the conclusion that all French food is prepared for the table either by being repeatedly banged with the flat of a hatchet, or by being chopped into mincemeat. These two processes continue for hours before both *déjeuner* and *dîner*. The strident voices of Madame and Mademoiselle Marguerite fill any gaps there may be by calling for either " Odile " or " Rose," neither of whom ever seem to be there, and a shrill canary trills above everything else.

The schoolchildren clatter into school, or clatter out again, in wooden sabots : the front door bell, specially on market days, jingles constantly, and officers, soldiers, workmen, market women, stump in and out with their sabots on the flagged passages and converse in loud and shrill voices. A despatch-rider on a motor bicycle flashes through the town, warning all and sundry of his approach by a raucous

## MORE VILLAGE NOISES

horn, and at intervals a ridiculous train, incessantly tootling a sort of foghorn, meanders down the street.

One of the days I was ill we had a really heavy gale, and above the howling and shrieking of the wind and the lashing of rain against the windows, shutters flapped and banged all down the street, or were wrenched off their hinges and dashed against walls ; chimney-pots came down with sundry crashes, and sheds and lean-to's were lifted up and blown bodily away.

When there might otherwise be an occasional moment of peace, the maids shut themselves in next door to me and turn a mangle for an hour or two ; or they turn out the contents of a bedroom into the passage and bang everything with sticks to get the dust out ; or it is *déjeuner* and the *élite* of Héricourt, including a good many officers, come in and lunch just under me and spend most of the meal scraping their chairs.

If it isn't one thing it is another.

We have several times had soldiers come to the canteen who have been in English

## THE CANTEENERS

hospitals at Le Tréport, Dieppe, and so on, and who speak in the highest terms of them. “*Nous étions bien soignés, en effet,*” they say; “*très, très bien soignés; c’était un vrai paradis, l’hôpital*”—which is very pleasant hearing. And they generally want to shake hands with us because we remind them of their nurses.

Yesterday a procession passed through Héricourt and on past our barracks which lasted all through the afternoon and on into the dark. It was the 98th and 99th Regiments, with all their travelling paraphernalia—army carts, supply-waggons, ammunition-waggons, gun-carriages, ambulances, field-kitchens cooking as they went, and leaving the odours of the next meal behind them. The men march for fifty minutes, and rest for ten, but as the roads were ankle-deep in melting slush, they could but stand still when the rest time came. They looked a very determined, dour, serious set of men, hardly any young ones among them.

We stood out in the snow, catching chilblains and colds, for a long time, watching them go by, and wishing we

## ACID-DROPS FOR SOLDIERS

could give them all hot coffee. Mrs. Sollas ran about among them and distributed acid-drops to all she could reach. She has had 250 lbs. sent out by Prof. Sollas !

When we started home at about 6, another halt was going on, and endless Red Cross ambulances were drawn up head to tail. As we passed one we heard English voices, and of course stopped to remark into the dark hood, " Oh, how nice to hear English spoken ! " They turned out to be English Red Cross volunteers serving with the French army, and they had come from Rougemont through Belfort. They did not know in the least where they were going, so we were able to inform them that they were going to Seppois and Delle to reinforce the lines where the Germans were attacking violently. So, at least, our captain had told us.

Early the next morning these boys were to be seen still in Héricourt. They had got on as far as Montbéliard, but had been unable to find beds, so had returned here on the chance. They were very cheerful as they fared forth again into the unknown upon

## THE CANTEENERS

roads sodden with melting snow and water.

Coming back from a walk at dusk I met a workman who civilly called out " Bonsoir, ma sœur " as he passed. Then he stopped to ask me which hospital I was working at and if I came from a distance. When I said " Je suis anglaise " he beamed all over, and said " Will you shake hands with me for the sake of the *Entente Cordiale*? " We pumphandled cordially for quite a long time. He told me he had three boys in the trenches ; they had been there since the beginning of the war, and none had been wounded. He asked me if England was as beautiful as France, and when I said " Yes," he hoped it would never be invaded or injured by the Boches. An aeroplane circled over the fort while we talked, but it must have been French, as it was not fired at. Yet I certainly heard the sound of machine-guns from Belfort while I was on Mont Vaudois.

Madame said to me to-night : " If you hear guns in the night, don't be frightened ;

## SYMPATHY AND SUFFERING

we are going to attack the Germans, probably near Belfort." I suppose that is to draw troops off Verdun and Seppois, both of which are being attacked. The news from Verdun is better to-night. An officer who was at dinner told us that all the guns had been taken out of the fort at Douaumont long before the Germans got into it ; they found nothing there. I gathered the guns were on rails, or were movable in some way.

It is pleasant to be everywhere saluted in the neighbourhood. Even the tiny boys salute or take off their caps, and all the children say "Bonjour, ma sœur," or "Ma mère." All the peasants confide their doleful stories to one, often in such bad Alsatian French or German that one can hardly understand. Horrible stories all of them :—An old grandmother injured by an explosive shell who had to have both legs amputated above the knee. A young soldier, not long married, whose arm was cut off at the shoulder, and his silly, hysterical young wife refused to see him when he came home because she was afraid of the disfigurement. A young

## THE CANTEENERS

woman, hourly expecting her baby to be born, took refuge in a church in an invaded village in France ; shells fell into it and she was badly injured, both her legs being broken. The German soldiers refused to allow any one to go to help her for two days, even to give her water. Finally, an officer, less brutal than the rest, had her carried away to a German hospital. No more is known of her.

Odile, our handmaid, has a brother, who, being an Alsatian, has been swept into the German army, though he is at heart a Frenchman. As the Alsations are not to be trusted to fight on the Western front the regiment he is in has been sent to fight against Russia ; she has had no news of him for many months. Her father was ill six months ago, but she was unable to get into Alsace, and he died without her seeing him.

A *curé* from Paris has lately been staying at the inn. He was sent for to the "Hôpital Temporaire," where his only brother was dying from a wound received in the fighting near Delle. Day and night he remained

## THE *CURÉ*'S STORY

with him to the end. Two days later the funeral procession passed me as I was on my way to the canteen in the early morning. The *curé* walked alone as chief mourner ; and indeed, except for the *personnel* of the hospital, as only mourner, for his brother had been his only relation ; and the two, men of forty-five and forty-eight, had lived together in Paris.

Every soldier who dies at the military hospital is followed to the grave by such patients as are able and willing to walk ; by all the school children of Héricourt, both girls and boys, with their teachers ; and by some of the nurses and orderlies. It must take a good deal of the time of these latter, as there are, alas, many “*poilus*” who have fought the good fight, and have finished their work for France. As the processions wend their way through the town, and up the steep hill to the church, the followers are greatly increased in number by the townspeople, and the little church is nearly full for the last service for the dead.

The *curé* was sitting alone in the bar when I returned to the hotel, and I tried to

## THE CANTEENERS

get the poor forlorn-looking creature into conversation. He responded courteously, but not effusively, so I left him to himself. He left the same evening, a marquis-chauffeur, who dines here often, motoring him into Montbéliard to catch the Paris train. Even now his troubles were not over : the ambulance he drove in caught fire in some way, and the poor priest, interned at the back, was heard to scream, " Let me out, let me out. I am on fire." It was difficult to extricate him quickly, as he was stout. The rest of the journey had to be performed in total darkness, as for some reason the marquis was afraid to light his lamps : the petrol had ignited, I think. It was a pitch-dark night, and they had simply to feel their way along.

*March 3.* It is nearly a month since I first went into Belfort to get some money from the Crédit Lyonnais, and the very next day the bombardment began. They were to send me some money as soon as they received it from London, but I have not heard from them since. I wrote to

## A LAISSEZ-PASSER

them a week ago, but have had still no reply. Last night I went to the *maire* to get a *laissez-passer* for Belfort, in order to go to the bank myself, but the *maire* told me that since March 1 there were new regulations, and I must write to the *Général-gouverneur* for a permit, stating my reason for wishing to go, which I did the same evening. For all I know, the *Crédit Lyonnais* may be blown sky-high, and then where do I come in ?

This evening I had to go to the *maire* to get a telegram *visé*, and he asked me had I written to the *gouverneur* of Belfort ?

“ Yes,” I said ; “ I wrote last night.”

“ Let me see, Jeudi, Vendredi, Samedi, Dimanche ; you may get an answer on Monday.”

“ As soon as that ? ” said I, trying to look surprised. (Belfort is seven miles away.)

“ Yes,” he replied, quite seriously. (Officials never *can* understand sarcasm or exaggeration.) “ You may hear on Monday, and he may tell you the *Crédit Lyonnais* is shut, and has moved to Mont-béliard.”

## THE CANTEENERS

“ Oh, and in that case can you give me a *laissez-passer* to Montbéliard ? ”

“ Oh, yes, we can do that in this office.”

“ And are there any trains ? ” I asked.

“ If military necessities permit, there is a train at 5.30 ” (a.m.).

“ Oh, thank you,” I murmured.

“ And another at 11.30,” he continued.

“ That would do nicely,” said I. “ And how about coming back ? ” (Montbéliard is six miles off.)

“ There is a train back at 7.30 in the evening.”

“ Oh, indeed,” I remarked. “ And what would I do in Montbéliard for eight hours?”

He looked rather blank and pulled his moustache, and seemed to consider a little. Then he brightened, and said with conviction : “ Que voulez-vous, Madame ? C'est la guerre. La guerre ne s'arrange pas pour les civils.”

Very true.

As a matter of fact it took exactly six days to get the answer from the governor of Belfort, and then the *laissez-passer* was for one day only, the 10th.

## A GRATEFUL LETTER

The next time I asked for a *laissez-passer* it took ten days to get the answer, and then it was for three days later than the day I had mentioned. Suppose it had been an appointment at a dentist's—or, say, one's wedding ?

Here is a letter we received at the canteen from one of our *poilus*.

“ Mes très chères dames,

“ Quoique n'étant qu'un tout petit soldat de cette guerre mondiale, je ne peux pas laisser passer de telles preuves nouvelles de nos alliés d'outre mer, sans venir moi aussi vous prouver toute ma reconnaissance, et mon admiration, pour tout ce que vous témoignez de dévouement aux soldats de la vieille France.

“ Notre cœur serait trop ingrat de ne pas être touché de tant de bonté, et d'abnégation, qui seront surement le prix de la victoire des alliés.

“ Très chères mesdames, je peux vous assurer, que la mission que vous avez entreprise, et que vous menez avec tant de zèle, a été, parmi nous petits pioupious, un

## THE CANTEENERS

encouragement considérable, et une nouvelle confiance qui nous rend plus forts à l'heure de danger.

“ Comment voulez-vous ne pas vaincre le pirate commun, lorsque de puissants peuples, comme l'Angleterre et la France, en un mot tous les peuples alliés, oublient tout le passé, sacrifient tout leur être en commun, leur avoir aussi, et qui, maître d'une patience et d'une volonté insurmontable, luttent pour un droit, et une justice, qui ne doit, et ne peut, aboutir qu'à la victoire ?

“ Oui, mesdames, oui, nous y croyons tous, tous, à cette victoire, à la démonstration des cruels empires du centre ; et comment serait il possible d'en croire autrement alors que si près de l'ennemi on a une confiance qui a tué tous les sentiments sauf celui de la joie, par l'accomplissement du devoir, combien de fois a-t-il pensé d'être malheureux, le soldat ? Jamais si parfois, il a un moment de tristesse, tout est guéri par la seule idée qu'il se fait d'en avoir eu davantage, serait il malade il dira ‘ Ah ce n'est rien, j'ai été plus malade, mon

## A GRATEFUL LETTER

camarade qui est tombé devant l'ennemi, a souffert davantage, et le voilà consolé, à tel point qu'il ne se sent plus souffrir, ni fatigué, et ne pense pas même aux mauvais jours des demains.'

"Seules, quelques idées sombres viennent troubler la pensée du brave bibi ; un père infirme, qui se trouve encore dans la terre sacrée du domaine pour qui le poilu se bat ; une mère qui pleure les malheurs de ses pauvres petits, et fait son possible pour boucher le point d'une chaussette commencée depuis des mois, et que la pauvre martyre n'a pu achever encore ; enfin le souvenir de deux frères, l'un tombé glorieusement dans un assaut, l'autre, qui dans une tranchée, comme lui, attend l'attaque prochaine, tout à coup, un essai de l'âme tire le petit soldat de son rêve, et dans un élan suprême, il machonne en syllabes incompréhensibles, 'Vive la patrie, vive la France, vive l'Angleterre, vive les alliés.'

" ANTOINE RIGAL, poilu,

" 81<sup>e</sup> de ligne 34<sup>e</sup> comp. de bataillon,

" Secteur postal 161."

## THE CANTEENERS

Mrs. Huntington and I got back to the inn last night, covered with snow, and freezing cold. We sat down in the bar by the stove to dry and unfreeze. In the bar were Monsieur Roth, at his desk, Madame Roth, and Mademoiselle Marguerite; the Marquis de \* \* \*, who is the chauffeur of an ambulance; a *commis voyageur*, having a glass of wine, and one or two *poilus*. The marquis was having tea *à l'Anglaise*. We discussed everything in the world—French dinners, English breakfasts, bacon, Boches, religion and politics, and the new law for cutting off beards in the army. France is republican by nature as well as by name: everybody is on an absolute equality, and there seems to be absolutely no consciousness of difference of rank or station. After awhile Odile, the little Alsatian maid, came in, and the marquis got up and placed a chair for her, and she joined our circle and our conversation.

This morning I brought my writing into the bar, where I found an acquaintance, an ambulance driver, who had just come



ENTRANCE TO THE ARTILLERY BARRACKS.



## A DRIVER'S VIEWS

in for his coffee, having been out all night in and round Belfort. He spent nearly an hour expatiating on the war—in a large sense. He is evidently a Catholic, and a religious man. His views are interesting, and I will record a few of them. He believes that God (*le bon Dieu*, he always calls Him) has willed this war as a punishment to the nations, but specially to France, for their atheism and materialism. That the war must go on for a long time, because none of them (again specially France) are yet punished enough; they have not suffered yet sufficiently. He thinks that all the fighting countries will be ruined in the end, and that out of the ruin purer and better and simpler lives will be built. He loathes the Serbs, and despises them: he calls them treacherous, cunning, deceitful, full of all evil. I asked him would he not concede they were brave and patriotic?—to which he replied, Yes, but so were all the other nations. He says there have been of late three great diplomatists: King Edward VII., Leopold II. of Belgium, and Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

## THE CANTEENERS

Then he lamented the loss of the monarchy in France, principally, I think, because it gives a peg to hang loyalty on. "What are the French fighting for? a president, or a minister, who can leave his job whenever he likes, and nobody even remembers his name? Liberty? We have no liberty. Where is liberty in this country, when a dying soldier in a hospital may not have the priest in to shrive his soul?" He marched up and down the room all the time, and in moments of excitement his voice rose almost to a squeak, broke, and disappeared. He went off after his coffee, and only got back at about 9, frozen stiff; he had bread and cheese and coffee, and departed again into the bitter night.

"Alas!" he said, as he struggled into his third or fourth layer of leather coat, "there will be many '*pieds gelés*' after this."

The following afternoon we had a tea party: the horse captain, M. de Chanay, and his lieutenant, M. de Marne, came by invitation, and shared a beautiful English cake that Mrs. Sollas' cook had

## PRAISE OF TOMMY

sent her out, iced, almonded, decorated like a wedding cake.

We had a nice boy in to-day who had been with the English troops in the trenches at (or near) Dunkirk. He could not say enough in praise of them. "Il sont bons camarades, ma foi, bons enfants, toujours gais." According to him the Tommies were perfection; they never grumbled, were generous to a fault, gave away everything they had. "What did they give you?" we asked. "Cigarettes, oh, la, la, confiture; oh, la, la, la, tabac, gâteaux, chocolat, bonbons; oh, la, la! et nous causions tout le temps vite, vite, moi je parlais français, eux ils parlaient anglais, mais n'importe, et nous parlions sans mots, avec les mains, avec les yeux, avec la bouche. Oh, la, la, de bons camarades!"

Some went home on leave while he was there, and they all came back from home loaded up, hung round, with presents of all sorts, and everything was divided up and given away with impartial generosity to French and English alike.

## THE CANTEENERS

The guns have been louder and more continuous than we have ever known them. We stood in the snow in the barrack yard and listened, while five aeroplanes scouted overhead, and could hardly tear ourselves away.

*March 10.* This morning I went in to the Crédit Lyonnais at Belfort in an ambulance: I took a lot of trouble in getting a *laissez-passer* from the *général-gouverneur* of Belfort, and then it was never asked for, though we twice entered and left the town. The marquis would have taken me in, but yesterday he brought an infectious case back to Héricourt, and his car was spending the day being disinfected.

The Crédit Lyonnais had removed itself since the bombardment into a village to the north of Belfort, where, after much searching and many inquiries, we found it established in a school with a *personnel* of three—a sort of director with two school-boys under him. They were thrown into a perfect panic by the presentation of

## A VISIT TO THE BANK

English cheques, and made me write all sorts of things upon them, which I am sure will render them invalid in England. However, I have got the money, and the production of it evidently taxed their resources to the utmost.

I saw a Taube being fired at this morning by the Belfort guns ; at least, it is incorrect to say I saw it—it was too high ; but the air round was full of little tufts of what looked like cotton-wool. I am afraid it was not hit. A great aeroplane came soaring up from near where I was waiting for my chauffeur at the Hôpital d'Evacuation.

*March 16.* Last night Mrs. Huntington and I drove into Montbéliard with Juliet to see her off by the Paris train. The trains *viâ* Belfort are “ *supprimés* ” at present, on account of the Verdun battle, so she has to go *viâ* Dijon. The *hôpital temporaire* lent us an ambulance and an escort : Mrs. H. and I got leave to go too, as we wanted a drive. The escort consisted of the chauffeur, a “ Russian bear,” and two

## THE CANTEENERS

orderlies. Juliet insisted on sitting in front in the "Russian bear's" place by the driver, so he had to come inside, and it was all he could do to squeeze his vast furry overcoat through the opening. It was a wonderful, still, brilliant moonlight night, as warm as summer : the beautiful Vosges country of unhedged green fields and wooded crests and slopes lay serene and peaceful and bathed in moonlight, as if such a thing as war had never been known. Yet only a few folds of the hills away the guns were growling and snapping at each other, and men were being killed and mutilated.

An officer came out as we passed the barracks and crowded himself in with us, and we were rather glad of him when we got to Montbéliard, and the sentry came out to examine us, as neither Mrs. H. nor I had troubled to get a *laissez-passer*, and you can't go in or out of any town in the war zone without one. We therefore retired into the innermost darkness of the ambulance, and the officer and the "Russian bear" blotted us out from the sentry's view.

## MOTORING BY NIGHT

Coming back our driver lost his way. He had only come from Alsace two days ago, and I fancy was not accustomed to this particular make of car, judging from the noises and smells he caused it to emit. He chose to attempt to turn it round on a very narrow road, bordered on each side by sloping, squelchy, marshy grass, and, having managed to get it at right angles to the road, could not move it for love or money. We all got out, and the orderlies and the "Russian bear" applied themselves to pull and push and tug and shove—to do everything except swear. I have never yet heard a French soldier use a bad word. They were so polite, and so sorry and so apprehensive for our comfort, so we got in and sat down, while they tried fresh combinations of handles and levers and plugs and gears. We had had an excellent dinner (soup, sardines, omelette, *vol - au - vent*, French beans, beefsteak, dessert), and we had the hotel key with us, so we said we would as soon stay there all night as not.

However, we did not have to. Some chance movement on the driver's part

## THE CANTEENERS

started the machinery, and we suddenly plunged forward ; and, to an accompaniment of quite new varieties of noises and fresh smells of burning and frying, we regained the main road and were taken back in safety to our hotel.

*March 18.* This evening at 7 another *obus* fell in Belfort. The whole population of Héricourt immediately thronged into the street, and we waited almost in silence for the next. It came in five minutes, and then no more. We waited for some time, but finally decided that, even though Belfort was being bombarded, we might as well dine, as—who knew?—it might be our turn next ; and as Monsieur had thought it his duty to go back to his kitchen and dish up the dinner, it was clearly our duty to go in and eat it.

The first shell, I was told afterwards, fell in the middle of a garage and blew into little pieces three Red Cross ambulances which were stabled there. Two others just entering the yard at the moment were untouched and their drivers uninjured.

## BOMBARDMENT OF BELFORT

The next fell into the Escompte National, and I felt quite glad that *my* bank, the Crédit Lyonnais, had had the wisdom to move into the country with the £5 I have lent it. The third shell did not burst at all.

Général Joffre and President Poincaré were both in Belfort at the time, and one bomb fell very near the house they were in.

Early in the morning of the 20th the little family of twenty-five Ford ambulances departed for the front. But, alas, they no longer numbered twenty-five—there were three poor chauffeurs who had no cars, for three had been blown to pieces at Belfort. So only twenty-two set out this morning. We are to have twenty-five others, I am told. I think the chauffeurs have been learning to drive and repair them, and that is why they have been here all these weeks.

Ten days ago we had a day and night of heavy rain, which swept most of the snow away, and for the last week we have had weather like summer. Less than a week ago I went up Mont Vaudois, and found the ground carpeted with *scilla bifolia*,

## THE CANTEENERS

almost as blue as our English bluebell woods : here and there an anemone or an oxlip. To-day, six days later, there is not a scilla to be seen, but the ground is thickly starred with white anemones, and there are great clumps of oxlips, rows of lungwort along the dry ditches, and little groups of fumitory, ranging from crimson to white through every shade of pink and lilac. The woods seemed to be almost Swiss in their rapid transformation of dress. Ten days ago the whole countryside was deep in snow.

An officer called out through our window, " May I tell my dog to jump in here? " " Surely," I replied. So he told him to, and a great *chien de loup* was silhouetted in the window frame, and the next moment was on our counter, which he had taken in his stride, all among our flowers and coffee-glasses and papers and ink-bottles. The officer told us that one day the dog had pursued a cat into a pastry-cook's shop, and had succeeded in doing nine francs' worth of damage. " An expensive dog to





DISTRIBUTING CIGARETTES TO TROOPS.

## THE *CHIEN DE LOUP*

keep," I remarked. "Yes," he said; "but as he and I ate all the damaged cakes between us, it was not as bad as it sounds."

This officer was in the garage at Belfort on the evening when the bomb fell: he said the colours of the flames that burst from it were most beautiful—blues, purples, pinks and violets.

Yesterday morning we were startled by a sudden explosion close to our kitchen. A fool of a soldier, who had come in wounded to the hospital, had brought a souvenir from the trenches in his kit in the form of an unexploded grenade. One of the chauffeurs had handled it or let it drop, and it exploded and wounded him badly in the face.

The master of Fuchs, the *chien de loup*, insisted on photographing us this morning. I begged him to do one of Captain Blanc for me, as I had not got any of him, but the Captain refused to be penalised unless we were in the group too. The Captain came in a little while ago to ask if we had the *Commandant d'étape* concealed on our

## THE CANTEENERS

premises, because he had mislaid him. He apparently was on a visit of inspection to the dépôt, and the Captain was supposed to be trotting him round—I do not know if he was ever found. The master of Fuchs is a most exquisite photographer; he showed me some snow scenes he had taken in Alsace that I have never seen surpassed. He has been in the trenches since the beginning of the war, but had a severe chill and laryngitis: his laryngitis has become chronic, and he has been sent back to the dépôt as an *éclopé*, and is in charge of the ambulance department next door. We like him very much, and have been treating him as a boy. I guessed his age to-day at twenty-three; and he is thirty-five, with a daughter nearly as tall as himself!

In answer to Antoine Rigal's letter Mrs. Sollas sent him a tin of sweets. Here is the response:

“ Mes très chères dames,

“ J'ai reçu il y a deux heures et votre lettre et votre magnifique cadeau.

“ Oh, Madame, vraiment, c'est trop de

## THANKS FOR THE CAKE !

gâterie et de bonté, je m'empresse de vous offrir en deux mots toute ma sympathie et ma reconnaissance.

“ J'ai fait part à mes camarades de vos bonnes actions et de vos délicieux bonbons, ils vous envoient d'ici toutes leurs sincères bonjours et leurs félicitations.

“ En un mot recevez de nous tous, jeunes soldats de la France, toute la reconnaissance qui vous est due, et que nous ne pourrons jamais assez vous témoigner.

“ De tout son cœur, de la part de ses camarades et pour votre dévouement, merci de votre bon cœur.

“ Celui qui se signe votre tout dévoué et reconnaissant

“ RIGAL, ANTOINE.”

*April 4.* I think rumours of war are quite as interesting as wars themselves. All sorts of rumours go about here, and we never know what is true. There has been a general belief that the Crown Prince is at Mülhausen and is preparing an offensive against Belfort, as Verdun has proved a

## THE CANTEENERS

failure. Others believe that the French will not wait to be attacked, but are themselves preparing an offensive. Certainly there are great movements of troops, etc., going on. I was in Belfort to-day (having sneaked in in an ambulance, as the governor took no notice of my request for a *laissez-passer*), and saw miles of helmeted men going off towards the north, and other miles of artillery coming in: Héricourt is simply packed as full as it will hold of troops, carts, horses, etc. Every open gateway reveals rows of horses tethered to something or other and eating hay; the square is densely packed with covered supply waggons; every yard, open space, and back street is the temporary home of ambulances, motors, tumbrils and lorries, and the streets are so full of blue-coats one can hardly get along. There is a general feeling of expectancy and of confidence. Mrs. Huntington's "nephew," a nice young chauffeur who drives a doctor about, and who lives in a beautiful château in Versailles, whispered as he passed us at dinner to-night, "I don't think it will be

## A NEW GUN

more than a fortnight before you will hear of great events.”

The last four or five days a new kind of gun has made itself evident—very loud, and apparently nearer, but I believe not nearer actually. You can feel it shake the ground ; even in our kitchen we can feel the reverberation through all the noise of talking, putting coals on the fire, and the feverish activity of Lavet, the substitute for Thomas, who is away on “ *permission*.” We are told it is a new French gun—larger than any they had before, and of greater carrying power. We had feared for a time it was German shells bursting at Belfort. An aeroplane came down, or was brought down, three days ago near Héricourt. Both the occupants were wounded—one in his head ; the other had an arm broken. They were removed to Belfort in an ambulance, and the *éclopé* aeroplane followed them through Héricourt on a motor lorry.

Our new orderly, Lavet, gets through his work at tremendous speed, washing up and cleaning with a will, and with a noise, in

## THE CANTEENERS

order to have time to read. I have never seen anybody read so fast. The moment he has finished his job he is to be seen sitting on a packing-case covered with a sack, his elbows on the table, buried in his book. I do my best to supply him with decent literature. There is only one thing that will take him from his reading, apart from his work, and that is the gramophone. The moment that begins he runs to it like a needle to the magnet. He is a nice lad, and I fear will soon leave us, as he has nearly recovered from his injury : a shell burst near him and wounded one side of his face, and when it was nearly well eczema broke out on it.

Here is another example of the rapid change in the wild flowers here. A fortnight ago a certain clearing close to the fort was covered with oxlips, and a delicate large fumitory that grows about a foot high, and white anemones. To-day all have vanished except a few anemones, which meantime have turned pink, and will also vanish in a few days. Instead the place is a lush thicket of a tall crimson vetchling



RETURNING TO THE FRONT.



## “NEVER RUM TO-DAY”

and Solomon's Seal, and among them incredibly large plants of incredibly large dog violets. The fields, too, where a few days ago only daisies could be seen, are now covered with cowslips, with stalks eight inches long, and purple orchis.

Two soldiers came into the canteen : one leaned confidentially across the counter and whispered persuasively, “ Haven't you a little rum ? ”

“ I'm afraid not. It's not allowed here.”

“ Just a little,” he pleaded, holding up two fingers to show how much. “ I can't sleep without rum. Why, I woke three times last night because I hadn't had any. This dépôt is a poor place.”

“ Rum to-morrow,” I said, “ and rum yesterday, but never rum to-day.”

He liked the joke immensely and promised to come every to-morrow for it. The other man chimed in “ *Mais non*—this is not a bad place. I had a good bed last night, with sheets. Why, I have seen neither bed nor sheets for twenty months.”

I left Héricourt, with great regret, on

## THE CANTEENERS

April 9 in an ambulance, just as I arrived there three months ago. The driver did not spare his petrol, and I was thankful I was not a *blessé* returning from the front as we leapt and bounded and plunged over the appalling road that runs between Héricourt and Montbéliard. There is no available labour to mend the roads, and it is a wonder they are not worse. The very worst holes do get filled up after a time.

The train was so crowded that for a little while a French lady and a soldier and I had to stand in the corridor till the guard came along and unlocked an empty carriage marked "Réservé." So we each got a corner. But the soldier lay at full length and immediately snored, and there were times in the night when after violent stretching and plunging in his sleep his head landed in my lap and rolled about there. I thought perhaps he had come from the trenches, and this was comfort ! he was "*en permission*." The little French lady became confidential : she sat opposite me and shared my rug and coat. She told me she was on her way back from her

## A WAR BRIDE

honeymoon ; she had gone to meet her *fiancé* at some tiny place near Belfort, and had had great difficulty in getting there, having to travel by peasants' carts, as the trains were reserved for the military. She had been married just six days : she was nineteen and he twenty-two. She had evidently met with great opposition on her family's part, but was so thankful she had overcome it. " Now," she said, " I can do everything for him ; and if he is ill I can nurse him." It seems he had been *réformé* early in the war on account of his lungs ; then he had been unable to bear the remarks of people who called him an *embusqué*, and he had re-enlisted. He had been working as a cyclist in his regiment, and now he had ruptured a blood-vessel in the lung, and she thought he would be sent to the south to recover. In which case she could join him and live with him, and all would be well. She beamed at me as though her future was all rose leaves. Poor child ! But she is better off than some who are left widows at nineteen.

If Parisians live after the war by taking

## THE CANTEENERS

in each other's washing, they will find it an expensive life. An apron costs .60 and a nightdress 1.25. At Héricourt an apron cost .15 ; but then it wasn't washed !

I wanted to visit a friend at Meaux, which is in the *zone des armées*, and went to the *commissaire de police* to get a *laissez-passer*. But I was confronted by a tiresome thing called a "*carnet rouge*." Had I got one ? "No, certainly not, at least not to my knowledge. What is a *carnet rouge*." "You can't go into the zone of the armies without one." "But, Monsieur, I have only to-day come from the zone of the armies—nay more, from the *zone interdite* ; and I have never heard of a *carnet rouge*." The police were shocked. "Never heard of a *carnet rouge* ? How, then, did we exist in those parts ? How had I got to Paris ?—for you can neither enter *nor leave* the zone without one ?" I could only smile and say, "Well, here I am to prove the contrary. Now I want to go to Meaux." "But that is quite impossible, if you have not got a *carnet rouge*." "Very well, then, give me a *carnet rouge*. Do I buy

## THE CARNET ROUGE

one ? ” “ Oh, not at all : you have to get one from the Minister of War, and it takes eight days—fifteen days perhaps. Since two months *all* foreigners have had to possess a *carnet rouge*, if they are in the war zone, or wish to enter or leave it.” “ Then it would appear that I am not a foreigner, as I exist, yet have no *carnet rouge*.” “ How, then,” asked the *commissaire*, “ did you leave Belfort without a *carnet rouge* ? ” “ Well, I just left, you know. My captain gave me an *ordre de transport* ; et me voilà ! Moreover, he gave me an *ordre de transport* to go back to my post ; now can I go back with that without a *carnet rouge* ? ” I produced this and showed it him, and he was obliged to admit I could. “ The fact is,” I said, “ we are all much too busy in the *zone interdite* to bother about such things, and we get on very well without them.”

However, I had to give up going to Meaux.

I find there is a worse thing than having no *carnet rouge*, and that is having an incorrect one. I have just met Miss

## THE CANTEENERS

Wallace, of the St. Bernard canteen at Troyes, and she tells me she has been hung up in Paris for eight days on her way home, because the *état-major* there wrote "Troyes to Paris" on her *carnet rouge* instead of "Troyes to London," and so she has to stick here till the War Minister has time to attend to her case. I think the *état-major* ought to pay her hotel bill.

From Paris I paid a visit to Miss Gracie's canteen at Le Bourget, about an hour's tram ride from the opera, for which treat I paid 40 centimes. Miss Gracie and her three helpers live in a minute hut built in the yard of a *usine electro-mécanique*, where soldiers collect after illness or leave to be refitted for the front; they never stay more than a night, often less, and there is perpetual coming and going. Their canteen is open from 6.30 a.m. till 10.30 p.m., and when they are not serving the foremen and workmen of the factory with tea and coffee they are giving odd meals and drinks to the coming and going soldiers. There is never a pause, so they work in two shifts.

## LE BOURGET VISITED

Everything is free—tea, coffee, writing-paper, tracts, soap, biscuits, meat and bread, and one cigarette a day to each man after his coffee. One day Miss Gracie remarked to the *médecin-chef* how lovely it would be if the money which went in coal smoke could go in cigarette smoke instead—after which the coal for their fires mysteriously appeared without charge.

On the boat between Le Havre and Southampton I met the same Scotch unit who left Troyes in October for Salonika. They told me a little of their journey into the interior of Serbia, and of their hurried retreat before the German troops : then the struggles in the *douane* separated us, and I never heard the end. All had escaped, however, safely.

I got home without incident : we might have been torpedoed, but were not. I was told in the morning, after the calmest crossing I have ever experienced, that a submarine did have a try for us, but was chased away by a gunboat. I did leave my luggage at Le Havre, but that was not my fault, but the fault of the authorities at

## THE CANTEENERS

St. Lazare : the military bureau would not give me a railway pass till I had had my luggage weighed, so that they could enter the weight of it on the ticket, and the registration department would not weigh, or even look at, my luggage till I could produce a ticket. I did manage at last to reconcile the two bureaux to each other, but it was not easy, as they were about a quarter of a mile apart, and much time was taken up running backwards and forwards. In the end they only registered it half-way instead of to London, and did not tell me.

I travelled part of the way home with two young English aviators, who had been in prison in Germany for five months. Five of them had escaped together, and then had divided into two parties of two and three respectively. The party of two got safely across the Swiss border, by dint of hiding in woods in the daytime and travelling at night only, on foot or hanging occasionally on to trains in the dark. Somebody gave them civilian clothes : they ate turnips in the fields and occasionally begged a drink. I have never

seen two faces more cheerful and jolly : I travelled in the same train with them from Berne to Paris.

One day I had what I must really call a "*succès fou*." I had brought out with me from England half a gross of penny soap tablets, coloured and scented, and I put some out in a box on our counter. The next soldier who came in spotted them at once. He took them up one by one, examined them carefully, and then asked the price.

"C'est libre," I said. "Tout est donné ici."

He was thunderstruck. "Madame ! je puis en prendre une, sans rien payer ?"

"Oui, Monsieur. Servez-vous en."

He lingeringly and affectionately picked out the colour he preferred, and muttering "Savon ! libre !" he retired into the courtyard. Through the window I was able to observe what he did. He waited about till a soldier came in sight, then beckoned him mysteriously, and showed his booty. There was much gesticulation, discussion, and sensing of the soap tablet ; four senses out

## THE CANTEENERS

of the five were applied to it; lively satisfaction and handshakings terminated the interview, and soldier No. 1 departed, while soldier No. 2 remained on the spot to repeat the performance with soldier No. 3. This went on all the afternoon, the latest tablet always being displayed for the benefit of the last comer. By evening all the soap had gone, and the men displayed the greatest degree of gratitude, as soap is not included in their rations. After that I used to buy soap of a dull household variety by the hundred kilos. and cut it up for them in small pieces. Another pleasure we had was giving away 1,200 pairs of hand-knitted socks which were sent us out by some war *dépôt* in England. The socks were used for all sorts of purposes other than the legitimate one—as cholera-belts, chest-protectors, scarves, or gloves, with the ends stuffed up their sleeves.

Sunday was a sort of gala day. After “*soupe*” the men had cocoa and English biscuits, which were a great treat: if we called it cocoa they looked rather askance at it, but if we suggested *chocolat* for a

## GARE ECHANGE

change from coffee their faces were wreathed with smiles, specially the Zouaves or negroes ; they are all perfect babies about sweet things. Then in the afternoons the gramophone was brought out, and if fine we had a “ *café chantant* ” outside, often accompanied by dancing and singing.

### CANTINE DES DAMES ANGLAISES, GARE ECHANGE, LE BOURGET, SEINE.

If you asked me, would I choose to spend June at Spa Road, Bermondsey, I should say No. But that is practically what I have done. I was offered a post at Domrémy, which I should have loved, and at Le Bourget, which I knew I should loathe, because I already knew Le Bourget. I chose the latter, because Domrémy is so far, and I might have had to wait for weeks to get a *carnet rouge*, which has now become a *sine qua non* for getting into the *zone des armées*. The amusing thing is, that the first time I went to Le Bourget Echange Station, with M. Desmarquoy, the commandant told me I was in the zone of the

## THE CANTEENERS

armies, because it is a purely military place, and that *really* I ought to have a *carnet rouge*; however—and here he bowed and waved his arms.

It takes me a quarter of an hour to walk from the house where I have a bedroom, close to the civil station, to my canteen: first I go through the station, thread my way across the main line of the Chemin de Fer du Nord, and over endless tracks which lead to the military Exchange Station which connects the Nord, Est, Lyons, and Grande Ceinture trains. It is a wilderness of lines, points, signals, engines roaming about, strings of goods carriages, trucks, etc. (left lying apparently derelict), long platforms, and military bureaux. Soldiers with fixed bayonets are also stationed very freely about. After a final walk of about a quarter of a mile along a cinder platform one reaches our very dingy, dirty little canteen; it is the worst I have ever seen. It may once have been clean and fresh, but the smoke of six stoves going all day and every day inside, and the smoke of perpetually passing engines outside, as well

as the fact that there is a kiln close to us for burning refuse, which smoulders all day, have converted it into something little better than a hovel.

It is seldom I do not have to go back some time in the day to my lodging ; one day I was particularly bright, and had to go twice. First I forgot to take an apron with me, and as I was expecting a visit from Madame Desmarquoy, I felt obliged to go back and fetch it. And in the evening, having forgotten to leave the key at the bureau, I had to go back all the way, almost in the dark, as our orderlies have to get the key early in the morning so as to light the fires ready.

Three times back and forward, added to being on one's feet the whole day from 10 till 8, makes a pretty hard day.

I found the six ladies who had been running the show had all gone home before I came out ; two from another canteen which has been having a slack time had taken it temporarily in hand—Miss Worsley and Miss Nancy Roscoe. One or other of them came for a few hours every day

## THE CANTEENERS

during the week I was here alone. Miss Roscoe was a pupil teacher at Miss Bishop's School, and remembers John and Rachel quite well. She was what one of the children called rather contemptuously to her mother one day, "One of the side teachers, mother ; we don't mind them."

The work consists of pouring out coffee for any soldiers who happen along and filling bowls with *bouillon* for them ; giving those who ask writing-paper, postcards, or pencils, ink and blotting paper ; doing first aid to the injured, and washing and bandaging cut or sore fingers. One man came with a very severe knife wound in the abdomen, for which he had been discharged as cured from the hospital. It seemed to us very imperfectly healed and to be in danger of breaking out.

To-day a man was brought to me unconscious ; he had fallen backwards on to the line on his head. I decided it was wiser to have him carried to a doctor on a stretcher. There is always a Red Cross train sitting somewhere about the station.

## FRANÇOIS I. AND FRANÇOIS II.

The stream of men coming for drinks is quite steady ; but besides the regular flow we have wild eruptions—floods, tidal waves—of, it may be, hundreds—who overwhelm and almost drown us for ten minutes, or half an hour, and then recede like a spring tide, leaving us nearly exhausted but triumphant, because the *bouillon* and coffee have lasted out the ordeal.

We have two orderlies—they both answer to the name of François. So I call them François Premier and François Second. The latter is charming, very humorous and good-natured, and rather like Saint Joseph. The former is a lean, tall, powerful man, an untiring and zealous worker, very capable and trustworthy. He practically makes all the soup and coffee, and I taste and criticise and do all the catering. They take it in turns to go off for their meals, so we are never left alone. One comes early and the other stays late. François Premier was a sailor, and he has the blue eyes and the far-seeing look that our English sailors usually have. He is an Algerian.

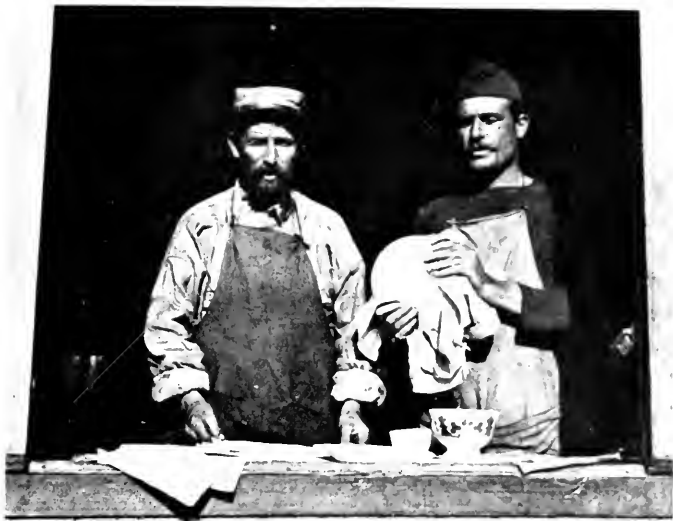
Our third orderly (*plantons* they are

## THE CANTEENERS

called here) is nomadic and keeps changing, like the guard. To-day, I regret to say, he arrived drunk, and got steadily more and more cloudy and stupid and futile, till I was obliged to send him away. The difficulty was to *make* him go without making the other *plantons* use force, or appealing to the commandant ; I just steadily stared at him, telling him repeatedly that he was to go away ; and finally his eyes dropped, and he went—but not till he had very solemnly shaken hands all round. I believe he retreated into a railway truck and went to sleep.

We have a very simple and efficacious way of supplying ourselves with coal and hot water : we just beg what we want from any stray engine that the station happens to be giving hospitality to. We fill our coal-boxes up with Government coal whenever they are getting empty, and fetch pails of boiling water to make our coffee and soup, or to wash our hands and scrub our tables.

Sometimes a soldier who has been on leave brings some eggs to be cooked ; these are lowered in a colander by means



FRANÇOIS I. AND FRANÇOIS II.



CANTINE GARE ECHANGE LE BOULEG



## PRECARIOUS MEALS

of string into the boiling *bouillon* for the requisite number of minutes. It doesn't hurt the eggs, and it doesn't hurt the *bouillon*.

It is simple, primitive, and economical. It is also the only way we can cook ourselves anything for lunch. Meals here are very uncertain and precarious. I have my morning coffee at a restaurant close by, after I have been across to the station bookstall for a paper : I have coffee in a small washing-basin and eat it with a soup spoon ; I have more bread and butter than I can eat for 60 centimes.

The restaurant is shut by the time I get home in the evening, so I boil myself an egg, and have bread and cheese, fruit, chocolate, jam, and *tisane*. The other meals are jumbled, according to whether one has time or remembers them, or has anything handy to eat at eating time. Sometimes I have two teas and no lunch, or two lunches and no tea. Or I have tea at lunch-time and lunch at tea-time. Or I have *bouillon* in the middle of the morning, and a sort of lunch later on.

## THE CANTEENERS

The busiest part of the day is apt to be between 5 and 7—though overwhelming floods may occur at any minute. At 5.15 the “Roccarde” is due from Marseilles, on its way through to Creil and Calais. It departs again at 6.45, so generally there is ample time to serve it with coffee, or make the men in it come to our canteen. Nearly always there are British troops in it, generally Australians, sometimes marine detachments, or some English Tommies from Egypt, or Anzacs. They always know where they have come from, but they never know where they are going. Everybody on the station is interested in our “*compatriotes*,” and makes a point of coming to tell us if any khaki is observed in the train as it comes in. It draws up at a distance, where we can’t see it. The French are always much impressed with them, specially with the Australians, and certainly they are splendid fellows, so keen and eager and agile, and lean and sunburnt. The two races mingle together most amicably, and clink their cup of coffee and drink to the *Entente Cordiale*. I hear





ZOUAVES ON HOLIDAY.



A SPAHL.

## AUSTRALIANS

murmurs of "*braves hommes*," "*belles troupes*," "*des hommes magnifiques*," "*de vrais soldats*," which are certainly all true.

It is the nicest part of the day meeting these jolly fellows and giving them drinks, writing-paper, and postcards, and, what they value even more, some old magazines, novels and newspapers. I collect all I can for them, and have got two or three shops in Paris to give me bundles of old English magazines. We get the strangest mingling of nationalities in front of our canteen. I have seen all at once French, Australian, Zouave, Belgian, Senegalese, Algerian, Negro, and English. Naturally, the moment they have finished their coffee the Britishers seized the bowls, and before you could say Jack Robinson there was a hot contest going on, Australian on one side, French on the other. Then, alas, the order comes to go—so different from what one imagines would be the Prussian command in similar circumstances! A brown, lean, tall sergeant calls out, "Now, chaps, I guess it's time we were making tracks"; and in no time they are all formed up in

## THE CANTEENERS

fours, three cheers are given, the last caps are hastily exchanged between French and British, and they are gone—all too soon.

One evening we had 300 of them, the next 150. In the course of conversation with the officer of these latter I found that really they were all prisoners, because they had outstayed their leave and missed their train the day before. "But," said the captain plaintively, "what can I do? I have no guard, so I just have to trust them." This unfortunate officer, as soon as he had dumped his little lot down wherever they belonged, had to go back to Marseilles again: already he had been in this train three days and nights, and I must say the whole lot looked pretty grubby and weary, though they were cheerful enough. But they said there wasn't a single lavatory on the whole train, so they could not wash.

One of the men had a tiny fox terrier puppy he had brought from Egypt; it had to have its tail docked, and they had drawn lots as to who should do it; and the man

## A LATE TRAIN

was pointed out to me who had undertaken to *bite* off the end the next morning ! Poor little puppy. They fed it on condensed milk.

On the night of June 15 the French clocks were all put forward an hour. I suppose the railways got rather upset, and the trains were apt to be late next day. The "Roccarde" was so behind time that we gave it up and began to shut the canteen at 7.30, when suddenly it turned up, and the faithful porter, whom I call our "*client fidèle*," hurried to inform us it was full of khaki, so we hastened across to invite them all round. But their officers would not let them get out. A few English Tommies who were along were allowed to come back with us and carry pails full of coffee for the rest : we just managed to feed them all round and give them a few books and papers before they were off, cheering heartily, and dropping souvenirs out of the windows to us. The officers were frightfully grateful : it was the first hot drink any of them had had all day ; they had all been two and a half days in

## THE CANTEENERS

that train, and they said the sight of English women bucked them all up enormously.

On the top of that we had a very full train of *permissionnaires*, who surged round our canteen and pretty well ate us out of house and home.

That was a very heavy day. We closed at 8.30, and there was only once a pause of about five minutes, when no one came, and we thought perhaps the war was over.

The first week I was here it was bitterly cold, with a raw northerly wind and a good deal of rain. On Whit Sunday we had a tremendous hailstorm; the noise on our roof was so loud one could not hear oneself speak.

The next day, June 12, while we were serving a train, we had a deluge of rain like a tropical downpour, only that the weather was arctic; the soldiers insisted on dragging me and my pail of coffee inside, and that particular carriageful had a very good time. Our canteen leaks at every pore, and when the hail came down we put up our

## ON TRUST

umbrellas, and afterwards it had to be swept up and thrown outside.

Before the rain had finished in came the "Roccarde"; we felt too exhausted after just serving one long train to start on another, so we went round and persuaded the officers of the Australian contingent to let their men come across to us. They were unwilling to let them out of their sight, but I promised to get them all back in time: I said I was sure they would all follow me like sheep when it was a question of hot drinks. The captain said "H—m! I fear some of them may be rather black sheep." However, they came—300 of them—and we got quite hot, and almost dry, supplying them with coffee and soup. As many of them as could crowd into the canteen came in and warmed by the stoves, and had a quarter of an hour of gramophone. We got them all safely back, after three cheers and much handshaking.

Just as we were closing on the 13th we noticed a cloud of blue in the far distance. We watched for a few minutes: then the

## THE CANTEENERS

lower half of it began to twinkle (that means legs in movement). Slowly it got nearer, and we hastily reopened and got things ready. Five hundred men materialised—they were in a desperate hurry; in a quarter of an hour each man had drunk and departed, and the platform was empty again.

*June 14.* A little sun to-day for the first time, and if it had not been for the wind it would have been almost warm. A drunken man came up and pitifully asked for wine : he could not believe we had none, and said he would pay me to fetch him some. He came three times at intervals, and was most serious and impressive about his needs, and ended up in tears. The soldiers waiting at the station for their respective trains are all “consignés,” which is hard on some of them, who may have to wait twenty-four hours.

We were just closing after a very hard day, when a message came from the commandant to say “ Please don’t shut, as a detachment is just coming in.” Now a

## LATE WORK

detachment may be anything from 50 to 500, and François and I looked at each other in horror, for we had run rather short of coffee, and if 500 came it would mean there would be none left for early next morning. I would willingly stay and make fresh myself, if I could do it alone, but I can't. To stoke the fires the heavy marmites have to be lifted on one side, and I can't move them. And I don't like to keep the *plantons* up very late, as they come on duty at 6.30 in the morning and stay on till I choose to close.

The detachment proved to be only about 100, so all was well, and François' brow smoothed out again.

On the 16th, a long train of *permissionnaires* came in about 5, followed close by a trainful of Australians who about cleared us out.

Next day Miss Wilkinson arrived, and I was very glad to get another helper. The principal advantage is that one can get off for a couple of hours every day, and there is also someone to work the gramophone. It is difficult to manage both that and pouring

## THE CANTEENERS

out without occasionally spoiling discs. I took advantage of her presence next day to accept an invitation to tea at Drancy Farm to meet some Tommies—a detachment who are engaged in mending army boots near by at Bobigny. It is a charming old place, of black and white timber work, with old red-tiled roofs, built round a large open square, with an old walled garden facing the east. In one corner of the yard Miss Worsley and Miss Roscoe have their canteen, where they cook for the infirmary and give drinks to everybody, including the prisoners, of whom there are several. These are not criminals, but merely men who are undergoing sentence for some military misdemeanour, like breaking leave or being late.

One of the walls of the garden had been pierced with holes for rifles during the German advance on Paris ; but they have long since been filled up again. Some Uhlans had penetrated as near Paris as the next village, no doubt expecting the German army was close on their heels. The Uhlans were killed, and the surrounding houses and



PETIT DRANCY FARM.



## DRANÇY FARM

farms were put in a state of defence, including the Drançy Farm, whose commodious outbuildings were packed as full of troops as they would hold. Trenches were dug and barbed wire entanglements hastily set up, which still remain. But the German flood had reached its highest tide, and began to recede, and Drançy was saved. And the Uhlans were the soldiers who advanced the nearest to Paris.

As I walked to the farm I stood in the trench and reached over the barbed wire to pick poppies and corncockle and cornflowers in the barley.

I got back to my post just in time to meet and succour 150 Australian and British troops.

*June 19.* Mademoiselle Comte spent the morning at the canteen and freed me to go into Paris : by going in early before breakfast one can get quite a lot done by mid-day. I spent most of the time going round to booksellers and begging for old copies of papers and magazines for the soldiers, and had a most gratifying response, specially

## THE CANTEENERS

from Brentano, in the Avenue de l'Opéra, who sent us not only old magazines, but the latest numbers of most of the illustrateds as well.

The Drançy tea party was a great success. The French had decorated the table charmingly with pansies and green boughs, and there was an ample meal spread—cake cooked by the English ladies, bread and butter and radishes, fly biscuits, and strawberries. We all did it ample justice, except the commandant, who unfortunately had an “*estomac*.” So many of the French have—it is almost a national failing. The conversation at tea was most amusing—stammering French in English accents, and worse English in French accents ; but the two lots of men fraternised delightfully in each other's caps ; and the moment tea was over the Tommies seized a football and were out in the fields playing, disregarding the elegant amusements provided for them in the courtyard in the shape of ninepins and a gramophone.

How the Briton sticks to his habits !

One of the men told me he had been

## AEROPLANES

through the whole war, landing in France with the first Expeditionary Force, in the retreat from Mons, the battles of the Ourcq and the Marne, the Aisne and Ypres, and had never had a wound or a day's sickness.

We are close to a flying school, and aeroplanes buzz about overhead all day and most of the night. As soon as the cold windy weather was over they came out in great numbers, and every evening as soon as it is dusk they appear in the sky whizzing like huge cockchafers, or darting and wheeling and manœuvring like swallows. As it gets dark they carry lights: the wings are illuminated with red and green, and below in the middle hangs a great white light. The sky seems to be full of Venuses sailing majestically and serenely at a distance, swimming in a vast silence; but at the same moment that one comes near enough for you to hear it you see also the lighted wings. Then they look like jewelled dragonflies, or exquisite toys made for the illumination of some *fête* or

## THE CANTEENERS

carnival—they look like anything rather than war machines. They manœuvre together very often in figures of eight and spirals and sharp turns, or they play follow-my-leader round the sky.

On the 17th we saw two aeroplanes which had been playing together suddenly perform the most daring feat—they were apparently looping the loop round each other ; but alas, it was nothing of the sort. They had collided with each other, and fell to the ground about a kilometre away from our canteen, rolling over and over and over. It seemed inevitable that both the men should be smashed ; but, strange to say, neither was really hurt at all, though the planes were rather the worse for wear.

When the aeroplanes turn sharp corners they go almost over on to one side, like a racing yacht, or a motor tearing round a track. It is very pretty seeing them right themselves after it and sail along level again.

On the 15th a number of men came in from Belfort ; they were all very cross, and even coffee seemed to fail to brighten them

## A LOST REGIMENT

up. They had gone there from Le Bourget to rejoin their regiment, but on inquiry on arrival it could not be found: nobody knew where it was. Apparently it had got mislaid or buried or sent skywards. So they had to come all the way back, which in a military train probably meant a day and night journey, to Le Bourget, which is a sorting station for all lost, mislaid, derelict, or returned-from-leave soldiers. It is to be hoped this regiment will soon be found, as in the meantime the men hang about and come to us at least once an hour for coffee and soup. The only other attraction we can offer them is the gramophone, which we sometimes work (by request!) for a couple of hours at a time, if we can spare the time to do it. We also had a number of Belgians, who seemed very pleased to meet some English ladies. Many of them had heard no word of their families since the German invasion. One young fellow, quite good-looking (which few Belgians are), stuck to us all day like a leech, helping us in the canteen, and working the gramophone for us nearly all

## THE CANTEENERS

the afternoon. He was a dear boy, and nearly wept when his train went off and he had to leave us. At the beginning of the war he had been taken by the Germans as a hostage or prisoner and had been sent away into Germany, but had escaped into Holland and got back to France through England and enlisted in the French army.

The worst of a gramophone performance is that we nearly always have a recitative engine whistle accompaniment, which is not necessarily harmonious, and it always comes in the most unsuitable places. If the engine chimed in in "Départ du Paquebot" or "Chauffeur d'Automobile" it would be rather suitable, but it never does that. It comes in suddenly with a sustained shriek in the middle of "Carmen," or "God Save the King," or "Chanson de Rossignol."

Sometimes at the canteen it is almost impossible either to make oneself understood, or understand what the soldiers are saying—as for instance when François I. is stoking our six stoves one after the other and François II. is grinding coffee,



AT THE CANTEEN.







A DAILY SCENE.

## AN EFFORT IN ENGLISH

and the third *planton* is boisterously washing up bowls and spoons, and the gramophone is playing "L'homme qui rit toujours," and several engines close outside are shrieking and letting off steam. "Mais que voulez-vous ? C'est la guerre."

Here is a letter one of the soldiers sent to Miss Wilkinson :

" *The 21th, 6/16.*

" Dear Miss,

" I am arrived yesterday very much fatiguated.

" After 36 o'clocks of train we have made 15 kms.

" You can think then that has been very dur for us, because in the train we don't sleep many, and when we have been obliged to walk that was not agreable.

" We are here in a village at six kms. of the first lines, but we cannot receive marmites.

" Our work consists in construction of tranchées in third lines. We go to tranchées six o'clocks a day, and all the 4 days we go the night.

" We are here only for 15 days.

## THE CANTEENERS

“ I don’t see other things to say you for the moment.

“ I close my letter in hopings receive quickly of your good news (in French).

“ I am, dear Miss, yours very sincerely,

“ RENÉ LAMBERT.

“ Don’t make attention at my mistakes, please.

“ 21<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs à pied,

“ 20<sup>e</sup> Compagnie,

S.P. 73.”

*June 21.* The most marvellous peace has reigned this morning for a short time, and we keep looking at each other and thinking “ Have the reserves of the French army come to an end, and are there no more soldiers to pass through Le Bourget ? ” It lasted quite ten minutes. I sit beside the coffee marmite at the open window ; Miss W. at the gramophone at the other end of the cantcen playing select airs (with engine accompaniment) to a quiet group of elderly reservists (territorials). François I. sits at a table peeling and cutting onions, and François II. is perched

## PAINTED GUNS

on a table by my side reading *Le Petit Journal*.

We saw such guns passing through yesterday—monsters : the men travelling with them looked like little ants or flies—like a kitten sitting on an elephant. They are 400 and 500 mm. guns, painted blotchily and fantastically in sky and tree colours, with foliage and stems here and there ; armoured cars are painted the same, to avoid detection. They look like ridiculous stage-pieces got up for a pantomime.

A soldier told me that the French troops who are fighting among the English wear khaki also to deceive the enemy, but I can't quite see the object.

It has been terribly hot to-day, really almost unbearable. I don't know what the temperature of our canteen has been ; but I went back to what seemed coolness in my bedroom at about 3 o'clock, and that was 80°.

We had No. 3 regiment of Zouaves at mid-day. One of their officers came up and asked if we could *possibly* give them something to drink, and seemed so sur-

## THE CANTEENERS

prised when I said "Oh dear, yes, any number of you; it is all ready." They came up in orderly detachments, being in a great hurry; the poor things were terribly thirsty; but then Zouaves always are, specially for coffee. They were a fine lot, all young and strong and sturdy. Their flag had been decorated three times.

In the evening we had 300 Australians through, as well as a lot of French, and a great many men travelling with horses, who might not leave their trains.

Ten times have I been up and down that platform to-day in this terrific heat! Miss Wilkinson and I both think we shall see it for ever in our nightmares. I am *sure* it is worse than trenches!

The key-note of our station is black. Black platforms made of cinders ground to dust; black trains and engines; black smoke. Against this the yellow of Belgians and Zouaves and the blue of the French show up to great advantage, but still more so do the picturesque uniforms of the Spahis. They have scarlet tunics braided





THE CROIX DE GUERRE.

## SPAHS

with yellow, very full-pleated cloth divided-skirts of a soft blue, brown leather gaiters and boots, spurs, and high brown turbans wound round and round with string like close braiding. Their faces are swarthy, with high cheekbones and dazzling white teeth, and their hair densely black.

I photographed a few of them; they were awfully pleased, but one old chap was in a terrible state about something. I could not make out what, so waited till he was more composed. At last he fished out of his voluminous garments a *croix de guerre* and pinned it on, and then by his smiling face intimated that he was ready.

The thirst of the Spahis seemed to be unquenchable. Fortunately they were limited in number, for they were the most expensive clients we have ever had to spend the day with us.

It has been a very "African" day—what with the heat, and the Spahis, and the Zouaves.

*June 23.* To-day has been pretty much the same as yesterday, nothing but

## THE CANTEENERS

Zouaves—this time 300 of the 2nd Regiment, and *all* terribly thirsty. They simply fell out of the train and screamed when they saw us and our coffee-pails, but they were not allowed to go away from the train, and we toiled three times up and down that weary, scorching platform, each carrying two pails, before they were all satisfied. I think our hair will turn grey if this heat continues—yet, if it did, we should still look black.

At about 5 it got cooler, and we had a sudden violent burst of wind, which blew three of our chimneys down on to the roof with a great clatter. Everybody rushed out thinking it was a bomb from a Taube.

At night very heavy rain, and the world has become bearable again.

I have had a charming conversation with François I. to-day. I explained to him that I was obliged to go home in about ten days; that I could not leave Miss Wilkin-son alone to work the canteen, and that unless other ladies came out to take my

## A VOLUNTEER CHAPERON

place we should most reluctantly be obliged to close it, at any rate temporarily.

He considered this for a little while, and then he made a really beautiful speech. He explained how he was a family man (with five children), “*fort sérieux et capable, et tout à fait comme il faut, père de famille,*” etc. ; and that the young lady would be perfectly safe in his charge : he would look after her in every way, and would even, if I wished it, daily conduct her to and from her lodging to the canteen. Even, he said, he had once taken a hatchet to a drunken soldier who was not quite *comme il faut*, and he was prepared to do so again for the protection of Mademoiselle should it be necessary.

I assured François I knew well that all he said was perfectly true and that he would make the most admirable father to Miss Wilkinson, but, I said (for I did not want to hurt his feelings, and of course her people would *not* like her staying on here alone), the fact is she cannot afford the money to run the canteen by herself, and

## THE CANTEENERS

unless other ladies come to share it with her she must go home with me.

Ever fertile in expedient, he at once had a plan whereby the canteen could be made self-supporting, and offered, if I wished, to run it himself and charge the soldiers the exact cost price of the coffee and *bouillon* they have. We worked it out and found the coffee costs just under a sou a cup, or five centimes. However, I fear that is out of the question, as the London *comité* would certainly not approve.

The 29th and 30th have been one continuous steady stream of clients, without ever a minute's pause. By the end of the day one becomes mechanical and wooden, one's smile becomes frozen on one's lips, and one's words cease to come when called upon, and all one's little jokes and stock remarks sound banal and witless. One serves in dignified silence.

To-night we were too busy to think of serving the "Roccarde" when it came in : we ignored it, though regretfully. As it grew close to 7 I almost began to count the

## COAL HUNTING

minutes, as I had been up since 6.30 a.m., and literally had hardly sat down ; 7 struck, and we were just going to put up our shutters, when a message came from the commandant, " Please don't shut yet, as there is a large contingent just coming in." It came, and not a single man-jack of them had a quart—which means double work, as each basin has to be washed before it is given out again.

The longest worm turns at last, and after that we closed hurriedly lest another message should come.

My only diversion to-day has been to try and run the coy and reluctant coal proprietor to earth : our coal has run out. François has been unable to take French leave (they call it English leave here) and help himself off engines, because for the last four days the engines also have been coy and reluctant : perhaps they have discovered our habits. In which case they get neither coffee nor soup. Both the François went out on a prowling expedition, armed each with a bucket, to-day, and by dint of searching and picking up unconsidered

## THE CANTEENERS

trifles lying about between the rails, they managed to bring in a small harvest. Coal is nearly as difficult to get here as it is in Switzerland. There you take a basket and buy a pound at a time.

*Saturday, July 1.* To-day has almost reached the point of being unbearable. Between 2 and 5 the canteen kept a steady temperature of 94°, and it was a very busy day indeed. One poured and handed out quarts, ladled soup, and washed basins without a break, except for occasionally working the gramophone for a change. Between 5 and 8 the sun shines straight into the canteen, and we stand and serve in the full glare of it till we are almost blinded. It is a relief when the evening train comes in, and we leave the men to take charge of the canteen, and we dash out with heavy pails of coffee—a distance very often of a quarter of a mile. This repeated several times finishes our day's work. It is a pity neither Miss W. nor I have got the particular disease for which Turkish baths are ordered, as we could





THE DANCER.

## OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM !

have them all day long at no charge, and by now we should surely be cured.

We had a little Zouave play the violin to us this morning, and with such vigour, sitting in the full sun, that it seemed he must melt. He played really well, and it was a pleasant change after the eternal gramophone. One of the soldiers asked for the British National Anthem, but after hearing it he still was dissatisfied, and began to whistle what he wanted. It turned out to be "Tipperary" he was asking for !

The hottest day coincided with the hardest work. We gave away over 4,000 quarts of coffee, *bouillon*, and "coco," which latter is the soldier's name for *tisane* of liquorice—a nauseous mixture, but very popular in the army. A quart is a quarter of a litre—about a teacupful.

I left Le Bourget on July 3. Since then the *personnel* has increased as well as the work. When I was there there was scope for much more than we were able to do in the time, and with only two pairs of hands ; the ladies increased first to four and finally

## THE CANTEENERS

to six, and as the heat increased, so did the soldiers' thirst, as well as the numbers travelling, and the hours the canteen was open lengthened out from 6 a.m. till 9 p.m. On their record day fifteen marmites of coffee (each marmite holds 400 quarts), two of *bouillon*, and two of "coco" were made and given : altogether 7,600 quarts !



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